Act 9

Act 9

-96:16:02

Ashes –

And a tragic scene to go with it.

It had been thoroughly ruined, to the point where one could not begin to tell what the perpetrator had intended to destroy. It was as though a storm had raged through and wrecked the workshop, leaving nothing to remind a viewer of its former appearance.

This was no storm, of course, but deliberate destruction. After all, how could a storm wash over this place, in an underground water tank? The carnage wrought on Caster's workshop could only have been caused by the power of an anti-army or perhaps an anti-fortress Noble Phantasm.

"Oh God… this is too much!"

Uryū Ryūnosuke could do nothing more than weep and wail in despair as he looked upon the scene of this tragedy. An onlooker might have been moved to sympathy upon seeing his pitiful, agonized form… that is, if they knew nothing of him.

Ryūnosuke and Caster had been busy hunting down fresh meat the whole of last night. But when they returned to their workshop, flushed with joy, they were greeted by this scene of utter devastation.

"The art pieces we worked so hard to create… it's too much! How can humans do this kind of thing?!"

Ryūnosuke's shoulders shook as he sobbed. Caster gently gathered him into his comforting embrace.

"Ryūnosuke, you still haven't seen the true evil lurking in the hearts of men, so your grief is understandable… what you need to realize is that only a small amount of people can truly comprehend beauty and harmony. The others, the rest of the rabble, will only react with bestial jealousy when they are exposed to sacred artwork. To them, beautiful things are nothing more than targets to be destroyed."

Naturally, Caster was also furious at the destruction of his sanctum. However, he had no choice but to swallow his anger and calmly accept the situation. After all, he had once been the general of a nation's armies. His battle intuitions told him that it would be dangerous to directly confront an enemy who could destroy all the demons he had posted as sentries and wreck his workshop so thoroughly.

That Ryūnosuke had not remained in the workshop last night was also a blessing of sorts. With that in mind, Caster's rage slowly mellowed.

"You need to know that our creations will often be destroyed by these rabble… because of that, we cannot be overly sentimental toward our art pieces. Everything we make will inevitably be destroyed. Thus, as creators, we should take joy in the act of creation."

"You mean… it doesn't matter if what we make is destroyed, because we can always create again?"

"Exactly! Ryūnosuke, that sharp understanding of yours is definitely the best thing about you!"

Hearing that, Ryūnosuke brushed the tears from the corner of his eyes as Caster laughed heartily. He sighed deeply as he looked around his surroundings.

"Is this God's punishment because we pursued our happiness too much?" he mumbled.

Caster's attitude suddenly changed as he heard Ryūnosuke's words. He firmly gripped Ryūnosuke's shoulders, turning him so they were face to face. A sharp glint flickered in his eyes as he looked at Ryūnosuke's expression.

"I'll only say this once, Ryunosuke… God does not punish humans. God only plays with humans."

Bluebeard's eyes burned with emotion, but his face was blank. It was almost as though he was a different person, compared to the tense mood he had had earlier.

"S-sir?"

"Once upon a time, I committed blackest sacrilege, the vilest, the foulest thing a man could ever do. Ryūnosuke, the sins you have committed are nothing more than child's play in comparison. But no matter how many I killed, no matter how sinful I became, no punishment from God descended

on me. By the time I had noticed, I had walked down the road to Hell for eight years. The harrowing screams and the mournful wails of thousands of children were lost in the nihilistic darkness!”

“In the end I was not eliminated by God, but by men who had endless desires, like me. The Church and King decided that I was guilty, captured and executed me. But all they wanted was my wealth and my land; they simply drew me into a trap to make those things their own. That was not punishment for my sins! That was nothing more than blatant robbery!”

At that moment, Ryūnosuke realized that he’d struck a nerve in this monster – but Uryū Ryūnosuke did not feel fear. Instead, he felt a loneliness and anguish that seemed to have no end. Compared to his prior glibness, the current expression on Caster’s face, as though he had lost everything important to him, made Ryūnosuke acutely aware of the sorrow that this great madman concealed in the depths of his heart.

“But Sir, even so… God still exists, right?”

Listening to Ryūnosuke’s soft murmur, Caster couldn’t help but hold his breath and carefully examine the expression of his common yet strangely noble Master.

“…why, Ryūnosuke? You have no religion and know nothing of miracles. Why would you think so?”

” Because it seemed as though this world was a boring place, so I kept searching. But the more I looked, the more interesting and unusual things I found.”

Ryūnosuke opened his arms as he spoke, as though he were embracing everything in the world.

“I’ve thought about this for a long time. This world is full of so many pleasures. It’s far too much luxury for an individual. If we simply change the way we look at things, we’ll discover that there are endless foreshadowing’s in here. In the search for true happiness, there must be no greater excitement than defeating the world. Somebody must be writing this, the world’s script. Someone must be writing this long novel with almost five billion characters… perhaps, this author is what we call God.”

Caster blinked silently, staring blankly into the emptiness as though he were contemplating Ryūnosuke’s words. After a while, he once again looked at his Master, and asked in a low, solemn voice.

“- then, Ryūnosuke, do you honestly think that God loves men?”

The serial killer answered cheerfully, “Of course. It’s a love from the depths of his heart. A God who is able to keep writing this world’s script for tens of thousands of years without stopping must love men very much. Hmm… I think God must be doing His best with His writing, while being immersed in the joy of creating His work at the same time. He is touched by the love and courage in His work, shedding tears at the sad parts, and also shocked and terrified by the horror and despair within…”

Ryūnosuke paused, as though to review what he’d already said, and then he continued.

“God enjoys the courage and hope of mankind, but he also likes the sorrow and despair of bloodshed. Otherwise… the hymn of life would lack its vivid color. Therefore, Sir, this world must be full of God’s love.”

Like a devoted believer praying before a holy painting, Caster listened to Ryūnosuke’s words with quiet solemnity. Then, he slowly lifted his head, his expression one of happiness.

“In this modern day, the people have already lost their faith and the governments have abandoned God’s creed. Once, I thought this was a world near destruction… but I am thoroughly impressed that new followers like yourself still appear at times like this. Oh Ryūnosuke, my Master!”

“Ah, no, no, I’ll be embarrassed if you say things like this.”

Although he didn’t know why, at least he knew Caster was complimenting him. Ryūnosuke coyly deflected it.

“However – from your religious perspective, my sins are tiny in comparison.”

“It is the nature of first-class entertainers to take on unpleasant chores to earn smiles, right? Sir, God will surely reward your merciless acts by joyfully returning those fools to us.”

Hearing what Ryūnosuke said, Bluebeard laughed out loud, seemingly pleased.

“Be it sacrilege or praise! For you, does it all seem to be the worship of God? Ah, Ryūnosuke, your thoughts are truly deep and philosophical. That God, who plays with the countless humans in the world is nothing more than a toy himself – I see! Then even this bad joke can be understood.”

After laughing for a while, Caster's eyes once more bore that forlorn look, the same look a man, madly devoted to his art, would have just before reaching his frenzied climax.

"Very well. Then let us use despair and vividly colored tears to dye this divine temple a splendid shade. I will let those in Heaven know that they are not the only ones who know what true entertainment is."

"Do you have any brilliant ideas again, Sir?"

Ryūnosuke looked expectantly at Bluebeard, who seemed more excited than he had ever been in his life.

"Since it's been decided, then let's have a celebration. Ryūnosuke, today's feast is going to be a bit special; it's to raise the curtains on the new religion you proposed."

"Understood. I'll do all I can to make it as COOL as possible!"

That night, Ryūnosuke and Caster had 'harvested' five children. These children, brought to this unknown, lightless place, were huddled against each other, shivering as they watched the crazed performance unfold before them.

In the face of these two crazed worshippers' new religion, the souls of these innocent children would not see even a sliver of salvation's light.

-95:28:46

Glancing out the window on a whim, he found that it was already dawn.

The slowly rising sun inspired no emotions in Emiya Kiritsugu's heart, and he continued his task of compiling information.

He had met Maiya at this hotel in front of the city station, three days ago. Now it was a hidden headquarters for them, one of many. The first thing he did was to suspend room service, and then he papered the walls with blank maps of the Fuyuki region. After that, he began annotating various locations on the maps with information pertaining to them.

The data had been collected over several days of searching on foot, reconnaissance by familiar, the variance of the leylines, tapping the police radio for information on missing people, and simple surveillance of various locations. And all these data points, dutifully indicated on the map nocturnal happenings in Fuyuki City regardless of size or importance like a mosaic, showed a state of utter chaos.

Emiya Kiritsugu's right hand continued its work of writing while his left hand mechanically shoveled his nutrition – hamburgers from a fast food restaurant he bought while investigating – into his mouth. For nine years, Emiya Kiritsugu had eaten at the table of the Einzberns, who were merely a hair removed from royalty themselves. He had grown tired of the cuisine. This fast food, filled with the sense of slaughter, was more suited to his tastes. Being able to eat without interrupting one's words or thoughts was better than anything, no matter how you looked at it.

When he had finally finished with his markings on the map, Kiritsugu studied them, and re-determined the direction of the Heaven's Feel.

Archer – there was no movement at the Tōsaka house. Like a hibernating bear, Tokiomi had closed his doors with an unfathomable silence and not left ever since the defeat of Assassin.

Berserker - the silhouette entering the Matō house appeared to be a Master, and the reports from the many familiars sent out suggested that he was completely defenseless and could be attacked at leisure, but Berserker's mysterious special ability could neutralize Archer's potent Noble Phantasm. Should he be left alone as a countermeasure against Tōsaka?

Lancer – Sola-Ui Nuada-Re Sophia-Ri had begun to act, in the place of her fiancé, the gravely injured Lord El-Melloi. She was probably the one controlling Lancer now. Was she temporarily taking on the responsibilities of a Master through the Book of the False Attendant, or had she seized the Command Seals and formed a new contract with Lancer? If it was the former, even killing Sola-Ui would not cut off Lancer's prana supply, and it would not make him unable to fight. For now, he would have to consider whether or not to attack Sola.

Caster – the night before, more children had gone missing from the city. It would appear he did not care about the warrant for his arrest issued by the authorities, and he was still continuing his inhuman acts without restraint.

Rider – no clues at all. Being that he constantly moves with his Master in his flying Noble Phantasm, tracking them would be difficult. Appears to be openhearted and forthright, a formidable enemy without flaws.

Regarding Rider and Archer… Maiya had awakened some time back, in the Einzbern Castle, and she had relayed the majority of information from Irisviel by telephone.

It seemed that things had progressed in an unexpected direction, so Rider, left with no other choice, had to use his Noble Phantasm to wipe out Assassin.

Rider's Noble Phantasm, "Ionian Hetairoi", was very much a cause for concern. But what Kiritsugu cared about more was the fate of Assassin.

Assassin was a Servant that could multiply indefinitely, but what did it mean? The troop of Assassins that had attacked the Einzbern castle last night must have been their entire combat force. Otherwise they could not have been able to present strength in numbers, being individually weak in combat. This was totally different from the prior farce at the Tosaka mansion; this time, it would be safe to consider Servant Assassin to be completely eradicated.

Then – what about their Master?

Kiritsugu sighed deeply, lighting his first cigarette for the day. In the end, he still felt apprehensive about this.

Kotomine Kirei. The greatest 'oddity' in existence during the Fourth Heaven's Feel –

Kiritsugu still could not understand exactly why this man had entered the war.

When he had discovered Assassin during the chaotic battle at the warehouse street, Kiritsugu had already realized that Assassin's Master was Tōsaka Tokiomi's puppet, only responsible for the task of scouting. But after that, Kotomine Kirei had taken many actions that Kiritsugu was unable to understand.

Kotomine Kirei, hiding in ambush at the construction site of the central building, during the attack on Kayneth at the Fuyuki Hyatt Hotel –

Kotomine Kirei, sneaking into the Einzbern castle from the opposite direction during its siege –

No matter how you looked at those events, they only made sense if you considered that Emiya Kiritsugu was his target.

First, he used the ruse of pretending to withdraw from the War, then fleeing to Fuyuki Church to request protection while dispatching large numbers of his Assassins as spies. To make this tactic even more perfect, Kirei should have continued hiding in the Fuyuki Church during this time, without setting foot outdoors. But his current actions have completely exposed himself.

Kiritsugu, originally hiding under the cover of Irisviel and Saber, had only been exposed during the confrontation with Lord El-Melloi, so nobody should have known his true identity up to the day before yesterday. Even if Tōsaka's intelligence network had discovered that Kiritsugu was acting in secret, he could not have concluded that Kiritsugu was the one who actually had the contract with Saber. That aside, from the overall perspective of the war, what was the point of targeting Kiritsugu?

It was possible that this could be due to an entirely illogical personal grudge, but that probability was very low. In the process of investigating Kotomine Kirei's experiences, there were almost no instances where he had crossed paths with Emiya Kiritsugu. There were no friends or relations to Kotomine Kirei amongst the magi whom Kiritsugu had assassinated, or even in the people around them who had been sacrificed.

In any case, what is definite is that Kotomine Kirei will continue standing in Emiya Kiritsugu's way. It is clear that this man's actions have already exceeded the boundaries of simply fighting for the Heaven's Feel. He will not withdraw even after losing his Servant.

Kiritsugu exhaled a mouthful of hazy cigarette smoke with an exasperated sigh as he continued thinking.

He could only feel waves of dread whenever he thought of Kotomine Kirei, as though he were imprisoned in bottomless darkness.

Kiritsugu's tactics were to 'confuse the opponent's mind' from the beginning to the end. As long as one can see through the opponent's actions, where he is preparing to attack and what the enemy's objective is, one can discover his opponent's blind spot and his weakness. In addition, a magus usually possesses a greater 'sense of purpose' than normal people. It is only because of this that Kiritsugu has never missed while 'hunting'.

But now there is Kotomine, an enemy whom he cannot begin to understand on a superficial or intrinsic level. This is his greatest threat. And before this powerful enemy, Kiritsugu was now all but helpless.

It was as though he had a tracker who could read through his mind and deduce all his actions. This time, Kiritsugu is not the hunter, but the hunted. This is the singular, unforeseen key factor –

“…who exactly are you?”

Kiritsugu finally murmured without thinking. The more he thought about the problem that was Kotomine Kirei, the further away from him his answer became. All he could do was become more frustrated.

What exactly was the point of this search-and-destroy operation? It looked as though he would have to continue operating with the risk of suffering a surprise attack at any time.

Kiritsugu had rented a garage in the nearby town and hidden a modified oil tanker inside it which could be remote-controlled over long distances. This converted civilian weapon, called a “low cost cruise missile” by urban guerillas, was originally the trump card prepared for use during siege by the Matō or Tōsaka. If one were to drive it into the Fuyuki Church in which Kotomine Kirei was laying low, even that Executor would not be able to survive…

“…Bastard, that’s enough.”

Kiritsugu messily snuffed the cigarette out in the ashtray as he reminded himself of that.

Now, in front of him, there were still many enemies which took priority in terms of elimination. What he had to win was the Heaven’s Feel. From that point of view, Kotomine Kirei was only a defeated Master. Even if the reason he was attacking Kiritsugu was unknown, it would be unwise to be too absorbed with him and neglect the overall battle.

This state of being impatient and frustration irritated him. It was probably a sign that his judgement was beginning to dull. He would need to rest and start over.

It had been over seventy hours since he last slept. Though he did not feel tired under the influence of amphetamines, his fatigue was still accumulating, and as a result his focus and overall condition were both deteriorating.

There was still some time before he would have to meet Maiya today; he should use it to get some rest.

After going to the bathroom, Kiritsugu lay down on the bed and used a self-hypnosis spell to disperse his consciousness. This was a crude way of eliminating mental stress, via the disintegration and cleansing of the psyche.

This self-hypnosis was not a high-level form of thaumaturgy, but the dispersion would cause a lack and dislocation of self-consciousness, so few people were willing to use it. But to Emiya Kiritsugu, it was the most efficient, and thus the best form of rest, and so he used this method frequently.

The scattered consciousness would be restored after about two hours, and the hypnotized person would wake up. Until then, the body of the hypnotized person would be like unto a corpse in terms of unconsciousness – but it should be safe to use it at this hidden place.

Kiritsugu, relaxed after dispelling the image of his enemy from his mind, fell into a deep sleep.

Facing the rising sun, the streets outside the window began a new day.

-91:40:34

"It looks like your mood today is fairly good. Archer."

As usual as if he was in his own house, the golden-sparkling Servant, sitting as he wished in Kotomine Kirei's private room, had for an unknown reason worn an unpredictable smile since morning.

Under normal circumstances, when a person wears a smile he often will infect the people around him, easing the surrounding atmosphere, but by coincidence Kirei was of a personality that was not the sort to like seeing other people smiling; moreover, the smile of the King of Heroes in front of him could only be associated with some unsettling things.

"Though I have not yet seen the likeness of the Holy Grail— even if the Grail is a worthless trinket, I no longer care. Because I have found something else of interest."

"Oh, truly surprising. Did you not once scoff that this earth has only forgery and ugliness?"

"That has not changed. But, on the other hand I am interested in watching, until the end, the final outcome of this Heaven's Feel."

Perhaps, the miraculous feast held last night at the Einzbern castle's central courtyard had caused some change in Archer's mood. But Kirei also saw a part of the process, and now in recollection— could it be because of Rider? Or because of the question-and-answer with Saber?

"I, as a person, like arrogant opponents. People who are not constrained by their own humble strength, and so are ambitious. Every time when meeting an opponent like this I will be very happy."

Looking at Kirei's puzzled expression, Archer leisurely waved the wineglass containing red wine and continued to speak.

"But there are two types of haughtiness too. The case in which the person has too low a caliber; and the case in which he has too great a wish. The former, not unusual one is very foolish, but the latter is of a difficult-to-obtain, rare species."

"Both are stupid things without any difference, isn't that so?"

"In comparison to mediocrity, this type of rare foolishness appears even more valuable, does it not? Though born human, but yet visionary of ideals so great that they are impossible to attain with human strength, and so abandon their status as a human to realize this one ideal—no matter how many times I see it I do not grow tired of it, the sorrow and despair of this sort of person."

Archer finished speaking, raising the wineglass as if in celebration, then elegantly downed the red wine inside. No matter how he appeared bold, this Heroic Spirit was completely unable to leave anyone with an impression of even slight avarice. Perhaps this was also his style of being a king.

"You said that, Kirei, but you appear unusually cheerful today."

"Only relieved. I have finally been released from a heavy burden."

The Command Seals that had originally been carved on Kirei's right hand had disappeared. During the battle last night at the Einzbern castle, his Servant-Assassin had been completely eradicated.

Kirei had completely forfeited his rights as a Master. Though it looked as if there had not been any change, but exactly as he had himself said, only now had he truly been released from the responsibilities and obligations of being

a Master. Kirei's temporary residence at the Church could finally be considered completely justified.

"Where have the vanished Command Spells gone now? Those existences that are after all the physical manifestations of magic, will most likely not disappear into thin air just like that, will they?"

"In theory, they should have returned to the Grail. The Command Seals themselves are things that the Grail bestows. People who have lost their eligibility as a Master because of the loss of their Servant, their Command Seals should be reclaimed back by the Grail. Yet, if there appears a Servant whose contract has been lifted because of the loss of his Master, the Grail will then redistribute the unused Command Seals it had previously reclaimed to new contractors."

Twenty-one engraved Command Seals distributed to seven Masters, disappearing after having been used once, and the Command Seals that at the end had not been consumed would then be amassed in the hands of the supervisor and commissioned for safekeeping.

"Then in other words, depending on the development of the war, new master’s may possibly emerge?"

The King of Heroes in front of him should not have such deep interest in something unrelated to his own desires.

Though he felt that Gilgamesh's question was to some degree somewhat abnormal, Kirei still continued to explain further.

"Indeed. But to be one of the candidates chosen by the Grail, is not something that can be casually decided. So, during the search for new Masters, the Grail will still prioritize the consideration of those people, possible Masters, that had been previously chosen.

In particular, the Masters of the '3 families of the beginning' are even more special. Even having lost their Servant, as long as in that period of time exist other Servants who have not yet formed contracts, they can, under a circumstance of not losing Command Seals, continue to exercise their authority as a Master. It seems that several similar things have happened in the past."

"——"

In the eyes of Gilgamesh, who had been silently listening to his explanation, Kirei perceived an unsettling pressure, and could not help but stop.

"What is it? Continue explaining, Kirei."

"Anyway, this is also one of the reasons a Master who has lost his servant in the war will gain the protection of the Church. When there appear openings for other Masters, they will have a very great chance of once again obtaining 'leftover' Command Seals. Precisely because of this, the methods that participants of the Heaven's Feel use against enemy masters are not to cause them to lose their combat effectiveness, but to directly kill them. This is also a measure to ensure that there will not be trouble from them in the future.

"Heh."

Gilgamesh, as if extremely happy, sneered, then once again filled the glass with wine.

"Then, so to speak— Kirei, don't you have a very great chance of acquiring Command Seals again?"

Hearing the words of the King of Heroes, this time Kirei sneered.

"That is not possible! The purpose of my participation in the Heaven's Feel is the same as my mentor Tokiomi said— to be a support for the Tōsaka faction, and now my assignment has completely ended. Assassin's investigation has been completely finished, Tokiomi-shi has already developed a sure-win strategy against all the master’s and their Servants. Now there is completely no need for me to appear again."

"I must say, I have great suspicion of this plan of Tokiomi's. That guy does not have the ability to obtain the Holy Grail at all."

"You truly speak freely of your own Master."

At Kirei who sniggered, Gilgamesh directed his crimson red eyes sharply at him.

"Kirei, it seems that you have a great misunderstanding of the Master-Servant relationship between me and Tokiomi.

Tokiomi faces me with the manner of a subject to his king, at the same time offering prana as tribute. It is because of this sort of contract that I agreed to obey his summon. Do not liken me to the other Servant lackeys."

"Then, how will you deal with the orders of the Command Seals?"

"I don't care... if a follower fulfils his obligations as one, then occasionally the king will listen to his counsel. That is all."

Kirei could not help but smile wryly.

If Gilgamesh knew the true objective of this Heaven's Feel... his contractual relationship with Tokiomi would probably weaken. Of course, if it truly reached that time, Tokiomi, possessing Command Seals, would certainly acquire an overwhelming advantage.

"Now is a state of competition for Caster's head. The one who attacks last and deals the decisive blow— Archer, it should be you. Now you do not have the time to slowly and leisurely sample wine."

"The way Tokiomi dawdles, it will be long before it is time for my entrance. During this period of time I can only look for something else to do, to kill boredom— Kirei, did you say just a moment ago that Assassin had already completed all his assignments?"

"Ahah, the routine business?"

Kirei had once promised Gilgamesh to inform him of the various Masters' actions and their motives for wanting to obtain the Holy Grail, for his 'entertainment'. So, to satisfy Gilgamesh's curiosity, Kirei had also ordered Assassin to keep watch.

"Ah, that investigation has also been completed. I should have let Assassin personally report last night. This way, the effort of explaining it—"

"No, this is good enough."

Suddenly Gilgamesh interrupted Kirei’s words.

“I have no interest in that shadow-like guy. Kirei, this sort of thing is only meaningful information when you say it.”

“……”

Although suspecting the intention of the totally unfathomable Archer, reluctantly, Kirei gave a brief summary of each master’s character.

From the intelligence obtained through eavesdropping on the conversations between master’s and their Servants and entourages, their motive for participating in the Heaven’s Feel could be easily surmised.

The Master of Lancer and the Master of Rider had no particular wish of the Grail and participated in this war in pursuit of victory only for the honor of magi.

As for the Master of Caster, he did not even know what the Holy Grail was. He only participated in this Heaven’s Feel in search of even greater thrills from killing people.

The Master of Berserker seemed to be searching for some ‘redemption’. Because he had fled, he had caused the second daughter of the Tōsakas to become a sacrifice and was now returning to request that the hostage be released with the conditions of the exchange being that he retrieved the Holy Grail. It seemed that he had a history with Tokiomi’s wife Aoi in the past. He was the one of the five enemy master’s whose motive was the most basely ordinary.

About Saber's Master — Kirei had to lie to Archer.

Assassin, up till being accidentally exterminated the previous night, had not found any information related to Emiya Kiritsugu. Only that that man seemed almost as if he had seen through to that Assassin being killed by Archer was a fraud, until the end thoroughly concealing his own secrets. It could only be said that to be able to do this under surveillance as strict as Assassin was truly worthy of appreciation. In comparison with the other master’s only he was a special existence.

And, even if Kirei had really discovered Kiritsugu’s true intent, he would probably not have reported this to Archer.

As it looked now, there were still many points of doubt. But even this, did not shake Kirei’s thoughts of crossing swords with Emiya Kiritsugu. This was Kirei’s personal problem, unrelated to the Heaven’s Feel, and he did not have the slightest intention of allowing outsiders to interfere.

Therefore, Kirei said to Archer, it was the Einzbern family’s stubborn wish, participating in this Heaven’s Feel only simply to allow the Holy Grail to descend. But Archer seemed to not have seen through to what Kirei was thinking in his heart, only barely interestedly listening to his report.

“—Hm, to let their hopes be dashed is also not bad entertainment.”

After having finished listening to the motives of the other five people, Archer said disdainfully.

"After all, they're only a pile of rubble. None of them have any creative thought processes at all. Thinking of seizing my treasure only for some silly

reasons… they're all thieving pests who should be executed directly without need for negotiation."

Hearing Archer's unusually arrogant words, Kirei helplessly sighed.

"For the information that required much work to obtain, do you have only these thoughts? It looks as if I have suffered for nothing."

"What 'suffered for nothing'?"

The King of Heroes, a meaningful smile on his face, said.

"What are you saying, Kirei? The efforts of you and the Assassins have produced great results, have they not?"

As if sensing that the other party's words carried an ironic meaning, Kirei stared at Archer and said.

"Are you mocking me, King of Heroes?"

"You don't understand? Never mind, it is excusable that you do not understand. Because you are a man who can only see what he cares about."

Completely ignoring Kirei's keen gaze, Archer languidly continued to say.

"—People who have no self-awareness, only simply pursue instinctive pleasure. Just like those beasts who chase the scent of blood. This type of feeling in their hearts will manifest instinctively in their words and actions.

Therefore, Kirei. When you, through yourself, again recount all that you have heard, seen, and understood, you have already amply shown your inner thoughts. That which your words describe in greatest detail, is also that which you are most interested in.

In other words, observing a person's words and actions, is the best way of understanding his interests. Toys like humans, stories like life; there is truly no more meaningful way of entertainment."

"....."

This time Kirei also had to admit, he had truly been careless.

He had originally thought that this was only the King of Heroes' meaningless amusement. But it looked as if his judgment had lapsed; the other party was using this method to probe his innermost thoughts.

"Firstly, discount that guy you purposely hid the truth about. This sort of subconscious concern is but only a sort of stubbornness. Now what I want to talk about is the person you unintentionally noticed.

Then, speaking of this, of the remaining four Masters, who is it then that you paid most attention to?"

Kirei suddenly felt a strong sense of unease in his heart. At this point, it would be best to end this topic as soon as possible.

Regarding Kirei's indecision, Archer seemed to feel satisfied, smilingly drinking a mouthful of red wine, then continuing to say.

"The Master of Berserker. Called what, Kariya? Kirei, your report of this man was truly extremely detailed."

"... Because his matters are relatively complicated. So, the parts that require specific explanation are naturally more numerous. That's all."

"Hm, I don't think so? Because you are more concerned about this man's matters, you gave Assassin the order to 'thoroughly investigate these complicated matters'. An order you gave under circumstances even you were not aware of, purely based on interest."

"....."

Facing Archer's argument which did not permit rebuttal, Kirei began to review his own actions.

Matō Kariya... he had indeed believed this was a character that required especial attention. Not only did this person bear a strong hatred for Tokiomi, Berserker as his Servant also had the mysterious ability of being able to seize others' Noble Phantasms, considerably the arch-nemesis of Archer.

But in consideration of threat level— Kariya and Berserker would definitely not be first in line.

The Master and Mad Enhanced Servant, hastily prepared, that came forth to the war. They will probably be, of these five enemy groups, the quickest to be eradicated. There was not even need for use of some scheme; merely dragging out the battle into a protracted war would be enough.

As long as let be, he would be his own death. So, to some extent, he should probably be considered an opponent extremely easily dealt with. Against

such an opponent, still investigating the situation with such detail——taking a step back, it truly appeared somewhat insensible.

"... I admit it, this was a lapse in my judgment."

With the humility of a clergyman acquired from long years of self-cultivation, Kirei nodded and said.

"Indeed, after thinking about it carefully, Matō Kariya is but a short-lived and thus weak enemy.

From a long-term perspective, he cannot become a threat, is not worthy of attention. I have given him too high an appraisal, and only thus have to Archer— you, explained too much."

"Heh, is that it?"

Even though Kirei had made allowances, Archer's glittering scarlet eyes, still had an unfathomable expression.

"But Kirei, now let us suppose— in the event of miracle interweaving with luck, Berserker and his Master survived unto the end and furthermore obtained the Holy Grail. What will happen at that time, have you thought about it?"

In the event of, that is, assuming something completely unreal...

The ultimate end of what Matō Kariya seeks is only the showdown with Tōsaka Tokiomi. Not considering his chances of winning, in the event that he was in the end victorious over Tokiomi and furthermore obtained the Grail— at that time, what will Kariya face?

... It did not even require thought; it must be his own darkness. Originally for the sake of helping Aoi reclaim her daughter, but now to claim the life of Aoi's husband. He still seemed unaware this contradiction. No, rather than to say he is unaware, once might say he is, because of the jealousy and selfishness of his heart, intentionally deceiving himself and hiding this feeling.

When facing that bloodstained victory, Matō Kariya will definitely sink into the dilemma of having to face the ugliness of his own heart.

Archer, from one side watching Kirei silently thinking, smiled and said.

"I say, Kirei. Did you realize the true significance of my asking you this question?"

"... What do you mean?"

Archer's hint made Kirei even more confused.

Did his previous thought process have any areas of inadequacy...?

"Tell me, Archer. What exactly is the significance of Matō Kariya obtaining the final victory?"

"Nothing, nothing at all—hey, don't assume such a scary expression. I've told you so many times that I don't have the intention of poking fun at you. Think about it, why did Kirei Kotomine all along not discover the complete meaninglessness of this question? Do you not feel that this matter in itself is worthy of consideration?"

If this conversation were to continue, Archer would continue to lead him by the nose, step by step. So Kirei just gave up thinking, resting his entire body against the chair and saying.

"You might as well speak plainly, Archer."

"If I had posed the same question to you using another Master as an example, you would definitely perceive at once that this is a completely meaningless question, and directly cast away such a silly question. But with Kariya it is different. You did not believe this to be a pointless question, instead interestedly immersing yourself in this sort of hypothetical thinking. Completely uncaring that one is doing something so futile. This precisely is authentic 'interest'. Congratulations, Kirei, you can finally understand what is 'entertainment'."

"... Entertainment? You speak of pleasure?"

"Yes."

Hearing Archer's affirmation, Kirei resolutely shook his head.

"In the fate of Matō Kariya, there is no element that would allow one to feel 'pleasure'. The longer his life, the heavier the suffering and lamentation accumulates on his body. To him, an earlier death would instead be a sort of salvation."

"Oh Kirei, why perceive 'pleasure' that narrowly?"

As if facing a student with poor comprehension abilities, Archer sighed deeply.

"Exactly what contradiction is there between suffering and lamentation and 'pleasure'? So-called pleasure does not take any particular form; it is precisely because you do not understand this that you are confused."

"That's not something which should be forgiven!"

Kirei's angry voice, like a conditioned reflex, rang out.

"King of Heroes, only people with evil like you will feel happiness in savoring the suffering of other people. But that is the spirit of a sinner. An evil which must be punished. Especially you will not be on this path of faith I, Kotomine Kirei, live on!"

"So, you believe that pleasure in itself is a sort of sin? Heh, you do make fallacious arguments. You've become a really interesting man."

Just when Kirei was still considering retorting with a few words, suddenly an acute pain wracked his entire body, forcing him to double over.

"——!?"

From his forearm near the elbow came a burning pain. Though the reason was unknown, but this feeling Kirei had truly once felt. The same painful and strange feeling as now-- Kirei had felt it three years ago. At that time, it had been the back of his left hand. That was also when everything had started.

The pain was gradually replaced by waves of burning. Kirei stopped thinking out of surprise, only unconsciously rolling up his sleeve and checking his wrist.

On the back of his left hand, had suddenly appeared the holy marks of fate. The remaining Command Seals, the symbol of which part had vanished after having been used once against Assassin, had reappeared in their original size.

"Heh, exactly as I thought. But this is truly too soon."

"Bastard—"

New Command Seals. The numb feeling brought about by the intense pain proved that these were authentic holy marks, but even thus, Kirei nevertheless was temporarily unable to regain his senses, stunned and unable to say a word.

This is completely impossible.

At this point all the masters were still alive. And not one Servant had had their contracts terminated. Being again granted Command Seals under these conditions — this sort of thing was unprecedented.

And in addition, Kirei did not belong to the '3 families of the beginning'. That the Holy Grail would grant him, one who has withdrawn, with the same holy marks—what hopes did it have of him? This was truly a completely incomprehensible, abnormal situation.

"It looks as if the Grail still has high expectations of you."

Archer, with a somewhat sinister smile, said.

"Kotomine Kirei, you should also respond to the Grail's expectations. No matter what, you must have a reason to wish to obtain the Grail."

"I... my reason to obtain the Grail?"

"If that is truly a miracle that can grant any wish—the Grail is definitely able to realize even what you yourself do not perceive, the deepest wish of your heart."

Gazing at Archer's expression, Kirei suddenly felt a sense of déjà vu. Yes — that was depicted in the illustrations of the Bible, the expression of the snake of Eden.

"Kirei. Thinking will not bring you the answer. It is precisely this sort of thought, chained by ethics, that has distorted your knowledge.

Pray that you can obtain the Grail. At that time, you will find among the things the Grail brings you, the answer to the true happiness you seek."

"....."

This is something Kirei has never thought about.

This is a reversal of the ends and the means. Precisely because he does not know what his own wish is, he must obtain the Grail that can grant all wishes to find it out.

If it were just to find the answer- indeed, there is a way to find an immediate answer.

"... But if it is like this, I will have to personally destroy the wishes of six other people before being able to find the answer. And if I seek the Holy

Grail for my own personal intents... I must make an enemy of my teacher and benefactor."

"You must first look for a strong Servant. Otherwise, how will you contend with me."

As if speaking of someone else's matters, Archer leisurely drank a sip of red wine and said.

"Anyway, as a necessary precondition, you must first seize a Servant from the others.

As for what comes after... heh, Kirei, you're on your own."

As if now more interested in Kirei who had been again granted the holy marks, the scarlet eyes of the King of Heroes shone with the light of pleasure.

"To pursue, for your own desires. That is the true way of entertainment. Then entertainment will bring pleasure, and pleasure will guide you in the direction of happiness.

The road has been pointed out to you, Kirei. Pointed out extremely clearly to you."

-91:23:15

When it comes to the essential factors of a knight, the first to come to mind should be the sword and the armor, and the other vital one which does not fall behind those armors, is horse-riding.

Straddled on top of the saddle, controlling the reins and gallop on the battlefield at will- that is the expected appearance of a knight. This isn't limited to horses; other quadruped animals, chariots, or even Imaginary Beasts would suffice. This mobility which far surpassed walking and the exhilaration coming from such freedom is indeed the essential joy connecting together all such 'riding' abilities.

For Saber, who had fought her entire life as the King of Knights, the very act of 'riding' is something that had already rooted its existence in the depth of her soul. The 'Riding' ability that she possesses when materializing as a Servant is perhaps the true reflection of this characteristic of hers.

This is really marvelous – Saber remarked in her heart as she gently caressed the steering wheel of the Mercedes-Benz 300L.

The feeling of controlling this mechanical contraption is completely different from that of riding a stallion, but after only one experience she had discovered that this intricate mechanical contraption gave off the delusion that it is alive.

While it is obvious that mechanical gears have no blood or soul, it still loyally moved forward rapidly and sturdily according to the will of Saber, its driver. This deference the Mercedes displayed was like riding her own beloved stead, and it filled her with trust and satisfaction.

“No wonder Irisviel is so ecstatic about driving.”

As she realized this, a small question also invaded her thoughts – *since driving this car is so pleasant, then why did Irisviel pass the chance of driving to me this time?*

“How does it feel to be driving, Saber?”

Irisviel, sitting next to her, asked with satisfied smiles all over her face. It was a satisfied expression of a mother who had brought a new toy to her child and looked on as the child played.

“It’s truly an amazing riding being. If this thing appeared in my era, it would definitely be something unimaginable.”

Saber smiled and replied frankly, at the same time chasing doubt out of her heart. Irisviel must have believed that Saber would feel happy with driving and then proceeded to pass the chance of driving to her. Perhaps, it was a kind of a reward for her loyalty as a knight. If so, then Saber should also return this gesture as a knight.

“But a Servant’s ability is pretty awesome too. Although it’s the first time you are controlling a machine, the level of your skills can truly be regarded as first-rate.”

“I’ve got some strange feelings too, more or less – a feeling as if I possess this skill, I was made to master long time ago. Rather than understanding it with reasoning, I just remembered the controls of the next steps naturally.”

Irisviel hummed for a while, then suddenly a mischievous smile emerged on her face.

“I’ve suddenly got an idea. We should go to the world’s black market and buy something like the latest tank or bomber; if you get in and drive it, then wouldn't you finish this entire Heaven's Feel with one blow?”

Although she knew Irisviel was joking, Saber gave an amazed and bitter smile.

“Although your idea is interesting, I can declare this – there are no weapons in any era that can defeat my sword.”

While Saber’s words seemed over-confident, Irisviel did not beg to differ. Anyone who had fought together with this Servant would testify the truth of her words with their own eyes.

“Speaking of that, Maiya is getting deeper and deeper into Fuyuki city –”

Saber said in a low voice as she looked at the small truck that Hisau Maiya drove in front of them, which served as the forerunner.

“– Is it really alright? Is this house, which is going to be the new headquarters, too close to the center of the battlefield?”

“That is not something worth worrying about. Both the Tōsaka and Matō families openly built their defenses in the city. Other foreign master’s also resided within in the city without any qualms; it’s the Einzbern family who built their dwelling so far away that they appear to be the odd ones.”

For the Heaven’s Feel, which on broad principles demanded battles to be secret, the location of the headquarters didn’t have any special meaning. The so-called ‘advantages of the terrain’ is just referring to those elements of the leylines that had to do with magecrafts concerning spirituality.

“Also, considering this in terms of concealment, maybe this new place Kiritsugu chose is even more reliable than the previous castle.”

“…”

It seems Saber herself didn’t notice it, but her face was briefly clouded with a dark shade when Kiritsugu’s name was mentioned.

Not surprising, Irisviel had already given up in her heart. That's because the strife between the two was already predicted from the start. Irisviel's current position was to cover up for that. If that happens, she would have no choice but to think more of it in accordance to her reputation.

The strange combination of light van and classical sports car finally crossed the Fuyuki Bridge and entered Miyama. The scenery around them changed completely when they exited Shinto, a gentle and quite style, simple and carrying with it a historical weight, filled their surroundings. Despite being plain, the quiet row of houses makes one feel its history.

“This place really is too close to Tōsaka and Matō’s headquarters. He definitely chose a place no one would expect.”

“It’s said that the most dangerous place is also the safest. In terms of unpredictability, Kiritsugu’s choice is definitely correct.”

Although it was a comment of agreement, Saber voice still sounded somewhat stiff. Saber thinks Kiritsugu’s theories are appreciable in terms of strategies; what she could not endure was the coldness and cruelty of Kiritsugu’s tactics.

Maiya, slightly ahead, gradually slowed the speed of the light van and parked on the side of the road. It looks like they’ve already arrived at their destination.

“Here?... Fuuh. Another really mysterious building, right?”

Stepping off the Mercedes, which was following behind the light van, Irisviel’s first words were full of emotion.

A Japanese building that was full of classical elegance as if it was a stage set from a period drama. Even in Miyama, where the passage of time seemed unperceivable, this building should still be counted as one of an extremely rare style. Moreover, considering the large area this wooden structure took, it is an extremely rare example even in the architectural history of modern Japan.

However, the feeling of desolation emanating from this building was also extraordinary. It looks like it’s been lying unused for a long time. This place must have some history behind it as it pointlessly occupied such a large space in civic planning and wasn't torn down, while remained without human occupation and yet bore signs of frequent reparation.

“From today onwards, both of you would use here as your headquarters.”

Maiya, getting off the small truck, handed Irisviel a string of keys as she said those words with a matter-of-fact tone.

“Ah, just give this to Saber.”

“– Understood, Irisviel.”

Since her master ordered her to keep the keys to the rooms, Saber took the key ring from Maiya’s hand without hesitation.

There were many keys on the key ring. Apart from the keys for the main door and the porch, other keys for the back door and other rooms should also have been included. The shapes of the majority of the keys are the normal cylindrical kind; only one was cast in an ancient style.

“Maiya, what’s this key for? It’s very different from the other ones.”

“It’s the key for the storehouse in the courtyard. Although it looks very old, I’ve checked that the lock has no problems.”

After answering thus, as if she realized the condition of that building again, Maiya's cold face clouded just a little.

“This house was bought only a few days ago. I’m very sorry, but as you can see, there isn't any preparation at all. Maybe the inside isn’t really suitable for people to live in…”

“I don't mind. For the time being, I won’t complain as long as it can block out the wind and the rain.”

Although it didn’t sound like something a high-born lady would say, the Einzbern castle in the wildness wasn’t any better in terms of dilapidation.

“– If so, then I’ll be taking my leave.”

Maybe Kiritsugu gave her some other duties as well; Maiya quickly returned to the light van after she excused herself and briskly departed, leaving Irisviel and Saber who were still standing in front of the empty house.

“Then, Saber, let’s start checking out this new home.”

“Alright…”

After opening the lock of the door, as they thought, a run-down front yard without any maintenance for a long time, appeared. The courtyard was full of waist-high grass and the main house, immersed in weeds, gave out a feeling of unease.

“Is this what people call a haunted house?”

Irisviel seemed like she didn't care at about this desolate and abandoned house at all, and instead looked around cheerfully, like a bad child anticipating a haunted house in a theme park. Seeing her childish face in high spirits, Saber didn't even know what emotion she should respond with.

"Huh? What's wrong, Saber?"

"– Nothing. If you don't mind it, then it's good."

For Saber who had been through countless battles, this is already something she's used to, so there wasn't much that displeased her with this abandoned house's dilapidation. If Irisviel can also accept this, then there's nothing inappropriate about using here as the new headquarters.

"The inside must have a wooden corridor, and tatami, and paper-paneled sliding doors. Ohoho, I once said I wanted to see what old Japanese houses are like with my own eyes, and Kiritsugu definitely remembered that and did this in purpose."

"…"

How could that cold, cruel, emotionless man, who was like a fighting machine, think about sentimental matters like this on the battlefield? Although Saber didn't agree with Irisviel's words, she didn't say anything when she saw how happy Irisviel was.

Just like this, finished checking all the inner rooms while sneezing continuously due to the piles of dust she had to face, Irisviel finally wore a serious expression and began to contemplate.

"Is this far from your expectations?"

"Hmm. I'm already satisfied with this – it's a bit difficult for this to function as the headquarters of a magus."

Despite Irisviel's weak appearance, she was in fact a first-rate magus.

"Although it wouldn't be problematic to set up a bounded field around here, when it comes to setting up a workshop… but this is the tradition of this country so there's nothing I can do. The prana can easily drift away in a house with such an open structure, especially for the Einzbern craft… Aa, this is frustrating. If possible, I want a room sealed off with stone and earth…"

Saber, suddenly remembering something, spoke as she took out the last key that they haven't used yet.

“Didn’t Maiya say that there’s a storeroom in the courtyard? Shall we check that out?”

“– Aha, this place is ideal.”

Irisviel nodded and spoke with satisfaction as soon as she stepped into the storeroom’s door.

“Although it’s a bit cramped, I can practice the craft in here just like how I did in the castle. After all, as long as a magic circle is established, I can solidify my territory.”

Maybe Kiritsugu thought about this at the start, and specifically found this spot with a storeroom. After all, a traditional Japanese building like this with a storeroom attached is very hard to find.

“Then, let’s start preparing now. Saber, can you please get the material we put in the car?”

“Right, shall I get all of them?”

“For now, just take the chemicals and equipment for alchemy. Hmm, let me think… right, also take the red and silver makeup boxes too.”

“As you command.”

Saber carefully took out a particularly light luggage from the trunk of the Mercedes. Although it was Maiya who was responsible for packing the luggage, Saber had some idea about what’s in it as well.

When Saber brought the makeup box, Irisviel seemed to have already decided on the location she wanted to create the magic circle at and said to Saber while pointing at one corner of the storeroom.

“Then, I’m afraid I’ll have to trouble you, Saber. Draw two hexagrams overlapping each other on that spot, with a radius of six inches and facing this direction.”

“– Understood.”

Saber also knew a bit about basic magecraft, so she could easily complete Irisviel’s demands.

Despite knowing the meaning of the instructions, she wasn't clear on why Irisviel wanted her to do so.

"Then can you please mix some mercury for me? Strictly obey the ratios I tell you, and prudently – "

"Irisviel, I've got a question."

Finally, Saber couldn't bear it anymore, and spoke the question she's kept hidden in her heart since this morning.

"– You seem to be trying your best to avoid touching anything at all today; is it just me?"

"…"

"It's like that for driving the car or taking the keys… maybe such things can afford to be ignored, but you won't use your hands even for the all-important magic circle; there must be some reasons behind it. Please correct me if I'm wrong, but is there something inconveniencing you today?"

Irisviel appeared like she's having difficulties in talking about this and glanced around. Saber kept asking.

"If you aren't feeling well you should tell me beforehand. After all, I'm responsible for your safety, and I need to be prepared for such things."

"… Sorry. However, I really didn't hide anything from you."

Irisviel sighed helplessly, then turned towards Saber and stretched out her hand as she spoke.

"Saber, now I'm going to squeeze your hand the hardest I can, is it alright?"

"Aye? Sure."

Although she didn't know the reason, Saber stretched out her hand to hold Irisiviel's. Those fingers that were too beautiful and fine for humans softly took hold of Saber's hand – then, they shook extremely gently for just once, and Saber couldn't even feel any pressure.

"… Irisviel?"

"I'm not joking. I did the hardest I could just now."

Irisviel made a forced smile and spoke.

“Just opening my fingers takes all my strength away, and it’s impossible to hold or grab anything, not to mention driving a car. Just changing my clothes this morning exhausted me.”

“Wha, what on earth is going on? Are you hurt anywhere?”

Saber asked, shocked, but Irisviel just shrugged her shoulders as if it didn’t matter.

“I just didn’t feel well, so I shut off the sensation of touch. Although sealing off one of the sensations would suppress my spirituality in a large degree, it doesn’t have a big influence on other activities. This accommodating convenience must also be one of the advantageous points about being a homunculus.”

“It’s not so simple, is it?! Don’t force yourself when you aren’t well. You should see a doctor.”

“Don’t worry, Saber. Did you forget? I’m not an ordinary human. Even if I catch a cold, I can’t see a doctor – this kind of discomfort is only a blemish in my construction. It doesn’t matter; you don’t need to worry too much for now, I’ll adjust it properly myself.”

“…”

Although she couldn’t completely comprehend it, she knew if she kept inquiring about this then the fact that Irisviel is a ‘manufactured’ homunculus would be laid bare in front of her eyes. Therefore, Saber had to stop herself. It was because she knew very well that what Irisviel was most proud of was the fact that she ‘isn’t merely a manufactured doll’.

“Aaah, then I really have to trouble you, Saber. Things like the ones today, driving the car and creating the magic circle, would all need your help, my lord knight.”

“– These are what I should be doing. It’s me who asked questions that shouldn’t be asked, I’m sorry.”

“Alright alright. Then, let’s hurry and make the magic circle. As long as I can rest properly in a magic circle connected to the leylines, my situation would improve.”

“As you command. Then, please repeat the steps of the construction.”

Then, the duo began the creation of the temporary workshop in the storeroom. Saber concentrated on the creation of the magic circle of the Einzbern craft after she refined the mercury according to Irisviel's instructions. Like two harmonious sisters, the two of them busied themselves together in the storeroom, surrounded by a happy atmosphere.

But Saber would never have imagined that this happy time she spent with Irisviel in this storeroom and their smiles would be the final beautiful memories about this noble princess that she would hold.

-90:56:26

From the distant west, an army arrived, sweeping rolls of dust at its wake. No one dared to underestimate this invading army since the beginning.

Rumors about its might had already swept through the entire country like a gale long before this army arrived. Usurping the throne of the small country Macedonia in the far west country of Greece, the young king had since then subdued the neighboring countries in the blink of an eye and became the leader of Corinth.

Alexander –

It was said that his ambition crossed over the Straits, and he had wanted to extend his insolent neck into this great empire of Persia.

Of course, none of the brave warriors who swore utter loyalty to protect their glorious country would bow their heads before the invader. The warriors bet their augustness and honor as soldiers upon this and countered the attack of Alexander's army. However, the soaring morale of the enemy that appeared before them terrified them horribly, and they shivered in fright.

It was not due to the command of gods or the call of the greater good; all were only to fulfil a tyrant's desire of conquest. However – why would these soldiers have such a soaring morale, such a mighty fighting spirit? Even those warriors who swore to protect their country till their death could not contend with them.

However, it was not this that truly shocked the defeated generals.

Young Alexander, standing in front of the captives, opened his mouth and spoke as if he was a kid pulling a prank – what I want isn't your country. I want to keep progressing toward the East.

Then, is this country merely a foothold for his continuing conquest? – No, of course not.

Then, could it be that his ambitions even exceeded the Iranian plains, and wants to conquer distant India? – No, it's the East even further away than that.

Seeing that none of his foreign subjects could guess his intentions, the King said loudly.

"My goal is the end of the world. My destination is the furthest border of the East. I want to behold Oceanus with my own two eyes. I want leave my footprints at the beach beside that endless sea."

Of course, no one believed in his words, and they all considered it as boasts that he used to conceal his true intentions.

But this man really did return the domination of his conquered lands to the local nobles and brought his army away with him continuing towards the East. The defeated generals finally understood when they watched, dumbstruck, his back disappearing into the distance.

None of those 'reasons' that the tyrant said were lies.

He was only progressing towards the East and swept away those who stood in his way.

How pitiful and deplorable were those soldiers who discarded all their glory and riches and left their homelands to follow him!

At first, they also felt indignant.

And they thought how deplorable they are that they have to fight due to such a foolish reason.

But very soon they, who had lost everything, suddenly thought.

What would they see behind that mountain –?

What would they see at the other side of the sky –?

To explore the unknown world; isn’t that the dream that all men had once possessed in their youth?

But as their age increased those men, who had to cement their positions and keep climbing up the social ladder, simply discarded the dream of their youth for those illusionary glories and titles. Now, this man shattered their reason of existence in one night’s time – and once again ignited the dream they had longed for in their hearts.

The men who finally understood this held up the weapons in their hands once again.

They were neither heroes, nor generals- they were just ordinary youths, having just taken out their armor and weapons from the inside of the storeroom. Those hearts from which pride and willpower had been lost, regained only the heavy thumping of their hearts at that time, and they went after the back of the great king traveling to the east.

Thus, the army of the King increased endlessly with his victories on his road of progress.

How incredible were those people if they were to be beheld by others' eyes!

Heroes who were once defeated, generals of vanquished armies, and kings who lost their throne; everyone walked together, shoulder by shoulder, with the same smile on their faces and the same light sparkling in their eyes.

Towards Oceanus –

The men called loudly together.

Forward, to the East, to the more distant East!

Until, together with ‘that man’, they behold the legendary beach.

The long march still continued on without end.

Across boiling deserts, over chilling snow-capped mountains, fording billowing rivers, chasing away ferocious beasts, and fighting for their lives for times out of count with those alien tribes never seen before and the unknown weapons and strategies they deployed.

Innumerable soldiers died in foreign lands.

Their sight scattered while they stared at the back of the King, who continued forward.

Their hearing faded while they listened for the sounds of the tide from the distant East.

Even when they died in battle after giving all they had, their faces still held a proud smile until the end.

Very soon – they'd be able to return to the image in their dreams, the evening-mist-covered seashore that they had once seen.

There, no other sounds existed apart from the sound of the waves ceaselessly splashing against the shore; a distant and far-away sea that one cannot see the end.

That is the scene that their King described for them, but they never got to see for even once in their lives.

Therefore, this isn't a scene in their memories –

But a scene that they continued to long for in their hearts during their heroic crusading lives.

The youth seemed to hear a billowing of the tide when the dream of the Heroic Spirit's memories that was transmitted from a distant time and space ended.

That billowing had, perhaps, always echoed in his heart.

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Rider agreed without a question as soon as Waver mentioned that they should go have a stroll in the streets.

Of course, for Waver, there was nothing that interested him much in this eastern little town compared to his hometown London. He just wanted to find a book.

Although the easiest way to find books is to use the library, it would appear a bit inconvenient when a giant such as Rider was following him. Moreover, it's clearly foolish to bring a loud guy such as Rider into the library, which

demands silence. Besides, Rider had a history of destroying the library when he was first summoned out. It's going to be problematic if he went along, got recognized, and Waver had to pay for the damages.

So, he had to search in the bookshops – he had to go to larger shops to find English books as local bookshops usually only sell books in the native language. However, a market that is too busy can also be problematic.

It was the first time Waver walked in the streets of Fuyuki Shinto during the day. It was reasonable as he hadn't had anything in particular that needed him to come out during the day until now. The morning streets were completely void of the nocturnal feeling full of a demonic aura, and the warm sunlight and fresh air can make one's mood very glad.

"Say, what on earth got into you this time?"

"Nothing in particular; just wanted to lighten my mood."

Waver replied, his face full of annoyance, to Rider's rascally question. It wasn't as if he had something that irritated him or that he was unsatisfied with Rider's work; it was that pointless actions such as to lighten his mood has nothing in common with Waver's strategies.

Anyways, no matter what – he wanted to completely forget about the War of the Holy Grail even if for only a little while. That was the truth.

The meaning of joining this War of the Holy Grail had changed a little in Waver's heart. While these changes were small, they completely took over all processes of his brain, making his mind depressed or even suffocating.

"– Alright alright, just stop asking why. Anyways, weren't you yelling since the day before yesterday that you want to stroll at some busy place?"

"Mmm, the pleasure of feeling the bustling atmosphere in a foreign market is not any less than the pleasure of battles."

"… Countries brought into war and strife because of such reasons are pitiful indeed."

Waver mumbled helplessly.

Hearing his words, Rider tilted his head as if very surprised, and asked.

"What's wrong, kid? You talk as if you saw it with your own eyes."

"Alright, just pretend that I didn't say anything."

A rare number of master's who had established a contract with a Servant can experience former memories of the Heroic Spirit in the form of dreams. Waver was reluctant to mention what he dreamed of this morning although he didn't know if Rider knew about this. No one should want others to see through events in their memory; moreover, Waver didn't intentionally want to see those memories in the first place.

Rider immediately expressed immense interest to the shops around them as soon as they arrived at the bookshop in the shopping street in front of the station. It seems like Waver won't need to worry whether this King of Conquerors will stir up some trouble before Waver's proper business is done.

"Then I'll deal with some business in this bookshop."

"Mmm."

"Basically, you can do whatever you want, but you absolutely must not step out of this shopping street. We can't be careless even during the day. You need to be able to rush to me immediately if I am attacked."

"Mmm! Mmm!"

He didn't even know if Rider was listening at all. Anyways, Rider's big eyes, sparkling with light, were completely focused on the surrounding restaurants, toy shops, gaming arcades and food stalls already.

"… Don't conquer, don't invade."

"Huh!?"

"Huh what!? Seriously…"

Worried that they might draw attention if they took too long here, Waver stuffed his wallet into the King of Conquerors's thick palm.

"Don't steal anything, and don't you think about eating without paying! Go use money to buy something if you want it! Do you need me to use the Command Seal to tell you this again properly?"

"Hahahaha! Don't be so nervous. Macedonian decorum is applicable to all civilized men in any country."

There was no way to know if he really understood what Waver meant. Rider disappeared excitedly into the crowd of packed and raucous shoppers after he left this indifferent reply. Waver could only sigh as he looked at Rider's

gradually disappearing figure. Although he was still seemingly slightly worried, Rider is extremely adaptable to foreign cultures despite his careless demeanor. The soft methods he used against the MacKenzie couple last night was the best testimony.

However, if Rider spends all the money in the wallet Waver just gave to him, then half of all the funds he prepared for the Fuyuki Holy Grail War would have disappeared. Yet, compared with having Rider trigger some unsolvable problem, it would actually be cheaper to avoid that with spending this amount of money. As long as he can get the Holy Grail, it won't matter if he doesn't have the return fare. Waver had more or less matured a little for him to progress from his originally stingy personality to his current caliber of indifference towards money.

For Waver – he had no plans of buying the book he wanted even if he really did find it. It would be enough to just finish reading it in the bookshop. This was because Rider would definitely interrogate him about his reasons if Rider got to know about this book he wanted to read. Therefore, Waver didn't want to take the risk in buying it.

Perhaps because there were too many foreign residents here, the foreign language shelves not only contained tourism booklets and cheap paperbacks but also a large variety of other books. Although Waver didn't expect to really find the target, he found it easily contrary to his expectations. Waver immediately began to quickly browse through the content of the book.

He forgot about time as soon as the book was in his hands. This was Waver's specialty that didn't change since childhood. He has the confidence that he won't lose to anyone when it understands of a book after reading. However, in the Clock Tower, this kind of talent he has only makes it easier when researching through books, an ability that's just like a librarian. Therefore, he always thought with hatred that it would definitely be simpler and more straightforward had he been the one writing it whenever he saw a book full of unnecessary words and incomprehensible technical explanations.

However, those unpleasant memories were quickly chased out of his consciousness as he flipped through the pages. The content of the book Waver was now reading was very captivating, and it pulled the reader's thoughts along to gallop together at the distant end of the world.

Waver remained in an oblivious state of reading for he didn't how long.

Suddenly, Waver felt some extraordinarily heavy steps, different from that of an ordinary person, coming into his hearing. So, he immediately put the book back and pretended a calm demeanor. His sight happened to connect with that of Rider's, who happened to be looking towards the foreign language shelves, when Waver turned his head around.

"Oooh! I found you I found you! Such a short dude hiding between the shelves really can't be seen by anyone and is so bothersome to find."
"Normal people are all shorter than bookshelves, you idiotic giant! – Speaking of, what did you buy this time?"

"Oooh! I found you I found you! Such a short dude hiding between the shelves really can't be seen by anyone and is so bothersome to find."

"Normal people are all shorter than bookshelves, you idiotic giant! – Speaking of, what did you buy this time?"

A paper bag, so large that it made Waver feel uncomfortable, was held up in one of Rider's hands. As if he loved the contents inside to pieces, he eagerly opened it and showed it to Waver on the spot.

"Look! So 'Admiral's Grand Strategies IV' goes on sale today, and I bought the open day limited edition! Wahahahaha, my luck rank indeed work as well as they look!"

Waver couldn't help but feel a passing headache when he saw that what Rider bought was ten times more idiotic that the most idiotic thing Waver himself could think of.

"Say, you only bought the software for such a big thing…"

Halfway through his sentence, Waver suddenly discovered that the large paper bag in Rider's hand was too enormous as packaging for just one software disc. He immediately realized that this King of Conquerors bought the console as well.

"Alright kid! Let's hurry back and play together. I even bought an extra controller!"

"Let me tell you this: I don't have any interest at all towards this kind of vulgar games."

Hearing Waver say this, Rider immediately furrowed his brows in irritation, and said with a heavy sigh.

“Huh, honestly, why do you like to immerse yourself in that little world of yours? …Don’t you want to just find even a little joy?”

“Stop bothering me! How would a magus like me, who’s searching for the truth, have spare time to do these pointless things? I don’t have extra brain cells to waste on computer games!”

“– Hmm? Then you have extra brain cells to waste on this book?”

As Rider spoke, he pulled out the book that Waver just stuffed back into the bookshelf. This completely unexpected action made Waver uncontrollably rebuke him, out loud and nervously.

“O – O – Of course not! How do you know I was reading at this one before?”

“Only this one was put in the shelf the other way around; only an idiot would miss it – Huh? ‘Alexander the Great’… isn’t this my biography?”

At this moment, Waver wanted to be swallowed by a chasm opening up in the ground. This current feeling of shame was even worse than having his tutor Kayneth mock his essay.

“You really are a weird guy. Isn’t the real person standing in front of you more reliable compared to these records that you can’t confirm? Isn’t it easier to just ask me whatever questions you have?”

“Aaaaaa! Fine, I’ll ask you I’ll ask you!”

Waver yelled, half crying, and spoke after he grabbed the book from Rider’s hands and flipped to a page that he was particularly interested in.

“Historical records say you were a very short man, so why do you appear like an idiotic giant now?”

“I’m short? Where did you read that!?”

“Look at this! It is said that your feet can’t even reach the foot stool after you conquered the Persian Empire and sat on Darius’ throne, and at the end they had no other choice but to swap that foot stool for a table!”

“Aaa, you mean Darius? That couldn’t be helped; I’m indeed short compared to that tall man.”

Hearing Waver say this name, the King of Conquerors laughed loudly and clapped his hands, then said while gazing at the sky with a face full of reminiscing expressions as if he was remembering an old friend.

“– Not only was that emperor’s caliber very majestic, his figure was, too. He was indeed a ruler fitting for the mighty Persian Empire.”

From Rider’s description, the other man should have been a giant of more than three meters tall. When Waver’s brain thought of this, he couldn’t help but feel a chill.

“Unimaginable… it’s really unimaginable!”

“If we think along your line, then King Arthur was actually a woman! A woman! Isn’t that more surprising compared to my height?

Ah, anyways, this so-called history written by whomever at wherever is very hard to completely and accurately describe the situation back then.”

Rider laughed optimistically and said this as if he cared nothing about the discriminating records left in history.

Waver, staring at his expression, went on to say.

“You just let other write whatever they want? – It’s history concerning you.”

“Hmm? This isn’t much to be worried about… you find it weird?”

“Of course!”

Waver continued speaking.

“Any ruler in any era would wish to have his name remembered by those after him. They’d definitely all get angry if they know records of them, made by later men, have errors or missed something out.”

“Hmm, true. If you can leave your name behind in history, then it also counts as some kind of immortality. However, all these are meaningless to me. I’d rather have twenty more years of life like this compared to existing in such books with just my name for two thousand years.”

“…”

Although he didn’t know if Rider’s reply, accompanied with a bitter smile, was his true thoughts or only a joke – for Waver, who had just finished reading the history concerning the King of Conquerors, this was exactly the heavy topic that he didn’t know how to answer.

Alexander the Great, who created the largest empire in history to date, refused to lose himself in the glory of this great accomplishment and

continued forward at the same time. The curtains of his life fell after a short period of only thirty years.

No matter how later men lamented the tragedy of his passing at the height of his life, the emotions he expressed himself about his short life had a heavy feeling for others no matter how light the tone is.

“Aaa, even if I had only ten more years; I’d be able to conquer the West as well.”

“…Then, after you get the Holy Grail, how about wishing immortality to it?”

Standing behind the King of Conquerors, who excitedly wondered about the possibilities, Waver finally couldn’t control himself and asked as an interception.

“Immortality? This is a good idea. If I won’t ever die, then I’d be able to completely conquer the entire universe.”

Rider seemed to suddenly remember something as he said this, and his face darkened.

“…Speaking of, there was also an idiot who gave up the immortality he once found. Ha, that bastard really manages to stay on my mind.”

Waver had no idea what Rider was talking about, and it was also the first time that Rider spoke to himself in this matter. Right now, Waver had a new understanding to the meaning of Rider’s wish that he spoke of in the quiz of the Holy Grail last night.

In the afternoon, while the two walked on the road back home, Waver was silent the whole way through.

Everything on the streets would soon be enveloped with darkness, and the nocturnal Fuyuki city would once again become the battleground of the War of the Holy Grail. As a Master, Waver would also have no choice but face this cruel war with his Servant.

There was no terror or restlessness.

His Servant was the most powerful one; that was beyond doubt – because he witnessed the might of Rider’s true Noble Phantasm with his own eyes last night.

It still felt like as if he was right there even when he thought about it now, and he was able to feel the scent of the hot wind that blew the boiling sand dunes along.

An army of cavalry in high morale was in front of his eyes.

And also, the majestic and proud face of the king who drew himself to his full height in front of that formation.

Ionian Hetairoi – a Heroic Spirit with such a mighty Noble Phantasm has no reasons for losing. Alexander would definitely defeat all other enemies and obtain the final victory.

That would definitely be called the King of Conquerors, Alexander's victory – at that end, where would the victory of Waver Velvet, be?

Yes, he would never forget. He was once mocked and looked down upon by those so-called prestigious families and nobilities. He gambled all he had to join the War of the Holy Grail exactly as a counter blow for their contempt towards him. Obtain the victory of the War of the Holy Grail and become the best magus in the world; that was the goal Waver set to himself.

But the War of the Holy Grail that unfolded at Fuyuki completely surpassed Waver's anticipations… the Servant he summoned happened to be a guy who completely ignored his master's command and acted by himself to fight only with his mighty strength.

If this goes on, Rider would definitely walk step by step towards victory with ease. Meanwhile, could Waver only forever hide behind his Servant with fear, be of no help even till the last minute and just muddle through to the end of the War?

Would he obtain the Holy Grail just because he was lucky enough to draw the most powerful trump card? What would be proven with a self like that? Prove that he obtained glory under Rider's shadow? At the end, this would only make others continue their mockery.

And if Rider really lost, then – what would a Master as useless as himself do?

This kind of battle… if this goes on until the end, then there would definitely be no changes in him.

It would only display his incapacity, insignificance and humiliation even more when he's beside an overly powerful Heroic Spirit. This made Waver more ashamed that the humiliation he went through at the Clock Tower.

“– How come you’re so quiet? Hmm?”

A sound came from somewhere above Waver’s head. Looking up, he saw that Rider still wore the usual innocent smile that he found incredible and was looking down at Waver.

I’ve had enough with looking up at this angle.

I don’t want to experience this angle of being looked down upon no matter what.

I’ve had absolutely enough of you!

Although he almost spurted this impulsive sentence out, Waver barely controlled his mood with the final shred of manners in him and used a more euphemistic way instead.

“Nothing, just feeling a little bored with you.”

“See, you felt bored after all, right? That’s why I suggested us to play this game together –”

“It’s not like that!”

Like usual, this reply had nothing to do with the question, and it finally reached the limit of Waver’s patience.

“Having a Servant who’s so powerful that you’re almost guaranteed to get the Holy Grail… doesn’t bring anything to make me proud of myself! Making a contract with a Servant such as Assassin would have shown my worth even more!”

Hearing Waver’s words, Rider scratched his head with a snort.

“If you really were to do something so stupid, you’ve probably died many times over by now.”

“That’s enough from you! I have no qualms about dying in my own battle! I wouldn’t be here participating in the War of the Holy Grail if I was afraid of dying!

And – how do I say this – just from when did you become the protagonist!? Always acting by yourself before I gave the order; what kind of a position are you putting me into with all this? Just what did I come all the way to Japan for!?”

“Calm down calm down…”

Different from Waver’s worked-up mood, which was as tense as the tension between a drawn bow and bared sword, Rider still smiled without any seriousness. It was as if Waver was hammering a nail into a bag of rice; he couldn’t use any force.

“If the wish you want to fulfill after you obtain the Grail is able to move my mighty desires, then the King of Conquerors would be completely at your command from now on – how about that? Do you wish to grow a bit taller?”

“Of course not! … Haaa!”

Seeing that Waver’s mood became more agitated the more he talked, Alexander placed a hand on his head, and interrupted him as if saying ‘isn’t this good enough?’.

“Say, kid, you don’t need to be so eager, right? No matter what, this War of the Holy Grail wouldn’t count as the climax of your life, right?”

“What –!”

Isn’t this ritual the miracle of a lifetime? – Waver, who was about to open his mouth and rebuke, suddenly understood Alexander’s meaning. For this King of Conquerors, the Holy Grail is only a method to make him appear in this world again. His true goal is the conquest the entire, wide-spanning world after the War of the Holy Grail.

“If you really wish to pursue a life full of glory and dreams, then go and fight for yourself. It wouldn’t be too late to find a battlefield made for you after all that.”

“…”

In front of the miracle that was hailed as being able to grant all wishes, this guy’s wish happened to be just obtaining a human body – just how foolish does this action sound?

However, there is nothing wrong with this wish when it comes to someone who thinks his own value is higher than that of the Holy Grail.

Just what kind of a person is this guy, who is so arrogant and confident about his might?

It was with such questions that Waver purposefully checked up on the historical records. However, the more he knew about the glorious

accomplishments the history texts listed about this man, the more profoundly he felt that –

This man merely possessed a charisma that was overwhelming and incomparable with other mortals – so great was it that even those majestic and elite armies who worshiped him, believed in him like a god, and could even give their lives to him.

At the end, Waver had to admit – those who mocked the King of Conquerors's wish as a boring wish are the foolish ones who merely dragged their bodies along from day to day and spend their life away on nothing.

"I shouldn't be the only one unsatisfied with this contract, right?"

Waver asked in a low voice after he silently swallowed his humiliation.

"Hmm?"

"You must have some complaints too, correct? Like why I would, such a useless person, end up being your Master! You would obtain victory even easier if you partnered up with an outstanding Master."

Without showing if he really understood the meaning from Waver's heart, Rider said evenly.

"Mmm, you're right."

Rider lifted his head and looked towards the sky.

"True, if your figure were more imposing, then it'd look more fitting compared to now."

The King of Conquerors's half mocking reply ignited all the anger in Waver's heart in an instant. As the short Master became even angrier and almost erupted, Rider suddenly took out the world map that never left his side and spoke while pointing at the first page.

"Ok kid, look here, look at the enemy in front of us."

"…"

The map of the entire world was portrayed in the A2 size paper. Rider's so-called 'enemy' is this entire world.

“Come. Try to draw, in scale, the current appearances of us two beside our ‘enemy’. Line us up and compare us.”

Waver signed helplessly towards Rider’s pointless question.

“How can I draw that –”

“You can’t draw it, right? You wouldn’t be able to draw it no matter how fine your pen is. Even drawing with a needle tip would be too wide – us two are the same compared to the enemy in front us, just two very tiny dots.

Therefore, we shouldn’t care about whether it’s fitting or not at all.”

The tall Servant laughed without restraint.

“This body is just one grain of sand in a desert compared to what I should conquer. You and I are the same, both so tiny. Since it’s so small that it can’t be seen, what’s the point of us two comparing the sizes of our figures?”

“…”

“I feel even more elated precisely because of this.”

Rider laughed openly and continued to speak boldly.

“The more insignificant I feel, the more I want to use this insignificant body of mine to rule over the entire world. That is indeed the most exhilarating feeling… Listen, that is truly the heartbeat of the King of the Conquerors!”

Waver was completely defeated by Rider’s vigor.

In front of Rider, whose mind was so optimistic, the irritation and anxiety in Waver’s heart were only hassles that don’t deserve to be mentioned. The King of Conquerors’s eyes couldn’t even see those daily anxieties.

“… Basically, your point is that it doesn’t matter what kind of a Master you have. No matter how weak and small I am, it won’t be a problem for you at all, right?”

“Why would you think that? Oi!”

Rider furrowed his brows, forced out a laugh, and patted Waver’s back.

“Kid, this inferiority you feel is indeed the forerunner of having the spirit of a king.

You'd still think that you are insignificant no matter how I explain to you. However, you'd still persist in marching towards a higher goal even knowing this. Aaa, from my experience, the seed of 'supremacy' had already started growing in your heart."

"…You're not praising me at all; you're treating me as if I'm a fool."

"However, kid, you're so foolish that it's cute."

Rider smiled and spoke frankly.

"If I really made a contract with a Master whose ambitions are not too far from mine, like you said, then I would definitely feel really bored. However, your wishes far surpassed your capacities. Someone like you, who would chase after a 'far-distant glory', is the basic guideline of living in my time.

– Therefore, precisely because of this, I really feel very happy about making a contract with a foolish kid like you."

"…"

Waver turned his face aside, not daring to face Rider's rustic smile.

Why does this idiotic giant always use these unhappy things to comfort me?

Perhaps no one in the world would be happy when others call him a fool.

Thinking that he didn't know what emotions he should face Rider with, Waver almost wanted to disappear right now –

Right this moment, an unanticipated evil chill suddenly passed through Waver's entire body.

"Arg…!"

All the Magic Circuits in his body began to hurt terribly as if they were in a spasm.

Of course, this abnormality didn't appear because of Waver's internal causes. It was because an abnormal chaos appearing in the prana of the surrounding air and his Magic Circuits, calibrated to it, fell into an abnormal state with it.

Standing beside him, Rider also looked solemnly towards the East, as if he could deduce this abnormal prana's initiating direction with a Servant's instincts.

“…The riverside.”

Rider said in a low voice like a soldier about to walk into the battlefield. Hearing this, Waver also immediately realized tonight’s battle had already begun.

The War of the Holy Grail was still going on –

Having no time to attend to the sentiments still entwined within their hearts, the soldiers will once again throw themselves into battle.

Act 10

Act 10

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No matter what, the ones who perceived the presence of the strange sorcery weren't Waver and Rider alone.

The spell-like waves emitted from the surrounding of Mion River were close to the multiple aria of the ritual magecraft class, something which could not be activated without at least 10 people. Certainly, every magus in Fuyuki city—namely, all the masters participating in the Holy Grail War, would have sensed that at once.

Sola-Ui Nuada-Re Sophia-Ri who had newly acquired the rights to be a Master, and Lancer, were at that moment, looking for their enemy from a high place in Shinto best suited for a broad view, which was the rooftop of the under-construction Fuyuki Centre building. Tonight, mist of a somewhat strange amount seethed from the Mion River, causing their field of vision to thin extremely. With the eyesight of human beings, only the blur figure of the illuminated Fuyuki bridge could be seen.

“—Can you see what's going on? Lancer.”

At Sola's question, Lancer who was looking through the mist with his super eyesight as a Servant, nodded.

“It really is Caster. Looks like something has set up a camp at the center of the river. As for the details, I'm afraid I can't see it.”

As usual, completely lacking any notion to conceal himself, it was the improper defenselessness as a magus. Caster was simultaneously turned into the target by many other Servants due to the supervisor's arrangement, and yet he was still not aware of it?

“If we want to bring him down, now's the best chance, right?”

“Yes. Whatever he is doing, before he delivers his result, it would be wise to kill him first.”

Naturally, that was not all—Looking down at the Command Seals engraved on the back of her hand, which she had plundered from her fiancé, Kayneth El-Melloi, she thought. *I'm sure other master’s would have sensed Caster's appearance. If I'm aiming for the reward from the supervisor, the supplementary Command Seals, I have to go ahead of the other rivals and defeat Caster immediately.*

If they managed to seize Caster's head successfully, these Command Seals which lacked a stroke due to Kayneth's idiocy, would be complete again. Three strokes of Command Seals, the originally ideal form—Her flawless bond with heroic spirit Diarmuid would be regained back. By merely thinking of that, Sola could not suppress her violently throbbing heart.

“I will go out and attack. Sola-Sama, please stay here and observe my fighting.”

“No way! Now I am a Master. I'll back you up from your side.”

At those pleading-like eyes, Lancer shook his head determinedly.

“That cannot be done. With all due respect, my lady does not have the battle knowledge like Kayneth-dono does. That riverbank will become a place of death. Even for me, a battle in which I would have to protect my lady, whose defense cannot match up; is almost impossible. Please, please understand.”

“But……”

Although she was told that, for Sola right now, merely parting from Lancer's side for a short while was a hardship beyond forlornness.

“Or Else—Sola-Sama, do you suspect dullness in my spear point? That I am fooling about in this selfish fight?”

At Lancer who had narrowed his eyes and asked her that, Sola shook her head hastily. Adding to the humiliation Kayneth “bestowed” towards Lancer was out of the question. By all means, Sola had to make Lancer who still swore allegiance to Kayneth, to understand that Sola was the Master truly worthy of his loyalty.

“Lancer, I will leave the judgments at the battlefield to you. Please fight this battle freely, without any regret.”

“I am indebted to you.”

After lowering his head quietly, Lancer kicked hard at his steel-framed foothold, and leaped towards the light at the street under his eyes.

Looking at the back of that Servant who leaped from one roof to another on the close-up buildings, earnestly focused on the river, Sola saw him off with bitter, painful feelings.

Ever since substituting Kayneth as Master—that heroic spirit had never smiled at her; not even once.

From the base Kiritsugu prepared to Mion River, which was the source of the abnormal magecraft, Saber needed just a few more minutes to cover that distance with the Mercedes she was driving.

Logically thinking, since the streets of Miyama town were narrow and complicated, the time required would easily exceed 30 minutes. Nevertheless, the Riding skill of this Servant achieved the miracle of overthrowing this reasoning. The speed of the silver automobile which rushed through the narrow lanes and curves with bumps and close shaves, had already achieved the preposterousness of making one doubt even the laws of nature.

Springing off from the road onto the path along the riverside, the automobile stopped after it landed with an elegant spin turn. Without waiting even for the car wing door to open, Saber leaped out, and ran up the bank. The fog was thick enough to block the vision of ordinary humans, but it did not block Servants' eyesight.

Sure enough, her bitter enemy was right in front of her, calmly standing still at the center of the river, which was 200 meters wide. Alighting from the passenger seat onto the top of the bank, Irisviel ascertained the figure

in the mist with her magecraft-strengthened eyesight and frowned with an irritated-looking expression.

“Just as I thought, it's Caster.”

Saber nodded and observed the enemy Servant painstakingly. Alone and not accompanied by his Master as usual, he was standing straight on the sandbar-less river center, as if standing on the water surface. Upon a close look, the thing, which was turning into his foothold, was grotesque shadows gathering beneath the water surface. Looks like the swarm of creatures she battled at the forest the other day, had gathered under Caster's feet, forming a “sandbar”.

From the abnormal emission of prana. there was doubt that Caster was performing some sort of large-scale magecraft. The outset of this strange fog which centered about the river, was probably an aftermath due to this as well. Not showing even the expression of him focusing on his incantations, he was merely standing relaxingly— The vortex of raging prana overflowed from the grimoire in his hands, distorting even the space around it.

An extraordinary prana furnace, a Noble Phantasm which compiles the monologic procedures……Falling into the hands of a lunatic, there were no weapons as dangerous as this.

“Welcome, holy maiden. It is my utmost delight to be able to meet you again.”

At Caster who gave a bow in his usual courteous way, Saber's eyes flared with anger.

“You're incorrigible……Heretic, what's your plan tonight!!”

“I'm very sorry, Jeanne. This evening, the guest of honor is not my lady.”

His face twisted with a sinister laughter which could make one shiver. Although he would reveal a madness which did not exist before, Caster responded.

“—In spite of that, to be honored by my lady's presence again is a supreme joy to me. Please enjoy to the fullest, the banquet of death and degeneration this unworthy Gilles de Rais prepared.”

Under the feet of Caster's who was laughing out loud, the dark surface started shaking. The countless creatures which had gathered under the summoner's feet, protruded their innumerable tentacles

simultaneously—weren't they swallowing down Caster who was standing on their heads, receiving them?

At the first look, Caster appeared to have been assaulted by the familiars which had betrayed him. However, with his entire body covered by the tentacles, Caster proudly raised the voice of his mad, ringing laughter further up a tone, which was already similar to a strange shriek.

“Now, once again we'll wave the salvation flag! It's good that the abandoned had gathered. Great that the condemned had gathered as well. I am the leader! I am the commander! The resentments towards us, the oppressed ones, surely would have reached even “God”! Oooh the Lord of heavens! I receive the condemnation and offer up my body!!”

The bubbling surface swelled up and pushed up Caster who was still being swallowed by the tentacles. Before one knows, the number of the creatures becoming his foothold increased. If one considers the depth of the river, that number was already more terrifying than imagined.

“Caster is……being absorbed??”

In front of the eyes of the horrified Saber, the number of creatures crowding at the summoner's body itself kept swelling. The summons of Prelate’s Spellbook had to be of an inexhaustible supply. The countless tentacles entwined among each other and fused together and was already becoming a lump of meat.

The glittering, filthy mucus which could make one nauseous, was pretty much a sandbar of meat; an island of meat. Yet, as if that was still not enough, the assembly of creatures swelled continuously.

Even Caster's figure had disappeared. Only his voice reverberated like the cry of victory.

“O you proud “God”! O you cruel “God”! We'll drag you down from your heavenly seat! O Lamb loved by God! O humans who take after the image of God! At this very moment, scorn, insult, rip apart to your heart's content! We will ride on the guffaws of the rebels, to the lamentations and shrieks of God's children, and strike the gates of heaven!”

The dirty lump of meat had already swelled to the size of a sphere. No, maybe this is the real form of the diabolic underworld. All the familiars Caster had employed until today had to be but the bits and pieces of *this*; small fries which would not exceed *this*.

“That is……”

A grotesque shadow rising with darkness as its background. At that disgusting and yet overwhelming majesty, Saber held her breath.

Even the champions of the deep seas- whales and giant squids, could not boast of such large size. A nightmare which governs the ocean in the realm that is outside this world. Without a doubt, that aquatic giant fits the name of a “sea demon”.

It was fortunate that no one was standing with Irisviel at the riverbank, but at the other shore of the river, residences had already turned their lights on. In spite the fact that it was late at night, the mad sounds would be transported by the wind there. Naturally, such an obvious mystery would be exposed to the eyes of the public. At the very least, due to the thick night fog which shrouded visions, those able to witness the monster would be limited. The residents' panic would be confined into a restricted area.

In any case, the unspoken agreement that the Holy Grail war should be conducted in secret, was completely violated.

“I have underestimated this fellow……Summoning such a monster!”

“No, no matter how strong a Servant is, the “form” of the familiar they can summon, and use should be limited. However, if we were to ignore “using”, there should be no limit to it...”

The supposedly stout-hearted Irisviel revealed her awe through her voice this time.

“Neglecting the controls after the summoning, if it is just “inviting” ……no matter how powerful the monsters are, logically, it is still possible. As long as he has the prana and technique to just open the door.”

“……That monster is not under Caster's control?”

“No doubt about it.”

Irisviel's state of being shaken was probably because of the terror she was able to comprehend as a magus. Nevertheless, Saber did not have any pains at grasping the gravity of the situation.

“Magecraft is “the art of flipping through evil”. But *THAT* is a genuine “evil” which does not apply to the reasoning of those minions. The incarnation of something which have the craving desire of endlessly devouring with thorough greediness. To summon such a thing; that act itself is neither an “art” nor anything else!”

Whilst tightening her fists in anger, Saber considered the magus' madness.

“Well then, that creature is not challenging anyone to a fight……?”

“That's right. It was just invited to eat. A city like this takes only a few hours to be completely consumed.”

Caster did not even have the recognition of what a battle or a victory is. That demented Servant probably planned to wreck the “Holy Grail War”- the conduct itself; and to send it back, idle. Together with all the lives in this city.

At familiar peals of thunder, Saber turned around. At the open space of the park where it was just the two of them, the shining chariot of god's authority had just landed. Holding the bridles, the gigantic Servant shot an insolent smile at the person ahead of him.

“Yo, King of Knights. What a fine night...is what I wanted to say but looks like now's not the time for genteel greetings.”

“King of Conquerors……You're still incorrigible. Did you come again to make some jokes?”

As if evading Saber who alertly put herself on guard, Rider calmly raised his hands.

“C'mon, c'mon. Tonight's the only truce. If that HUGE FELLA is left alone, I can't do any killings in peace.

Since just now, I have been going around calling the other Servants. Lancer had agreed. He should have caught up by now.”

“……The other Servants?”

“I have squashed Assassin to death, and Berserker is out of the question. As for Archer...merely calling him is useless. He's the type which would respond to collusions.”

Saber nodded, and with a serious expression, hit her breastplate with her gauntlet hand.

“Understood. I have no objection to cooperating too. King of Conquerors, although it is just a brief alliance, let's swear our loyalty together.”

“Huhu, it's good that we have understanding when it comes to battles……Hmm? What's wrong? You Masters not happy?”

“.....”

Naturally, it was not that they were unhappy. Irisviel was just somewhat daunted at Rider and Saber's practical-minded sportsmanship, having placed their past grudge on the shelves. As for Waver, he did not even try to hide his wariness, as he peeked timidly from the driver's seat of Rider's chariot, not trying to get down at all.

Be it killing the enemy, or forming alliances, for those who live in battlefields, they definitely have no space for personal feelings, and have to make cold-hearted judgements- both of them probably had the same perspective in this matter. This is the spirit which could not be shared had they not gone through similarly troubled times.

Nonetheless, whatever they were to disregard now, Caster's recklessness had to be stopped. If an oath is something good enough for trust, the most prudent decision now would be to join forces here.

“I don't mind. Einzbern accepts the truce. Rider's Master, is that okay with you?”

At Irisviel's call, Waver nodded reluctantly.

“.....Einzbern, what's your plan? I heard from Lancer just now that this is not your first time fighting with Caster himself?”

Indeed. For Saber, this could be called the return match of that fight in their forest. They had barely managed to fight off Caster with Lancer's help, but having acquired incomparable battle powers, Caster had come to fight back. Nevertheless, this time Lancer was not here, and they had formed an alliance with Rider. From the way things are going, it was still not entirely gloomy.

“—Anyway, we have to defeat him swiftly. Right now, that monster is probably still being maintained in this world by prana provision from Caster, but once THAT THING acquires independent provisions and starts supporting itself, things would get out of our hands. To stop Caster before that...”

Satisfied, Saber nodded.

“His grimoire right?”

The autonomic summon prana kiln, Prelate’s Spellbook. That extraordinary Noble Phantasm was now buried with Caster's body inside the sea monster's heart.

“Indeed. We have to settle this before that guy gets up the shore to *begin his meal*. But...”

Frowning in displeasure, Rider gazed at that dark green giant which coiled round and round.

“Caster is at the depths of that massive meat. Well, what should we do?”

“Drag him out. Can't do anything else.”

At Rider's grumble, a new voice from the darkness behind responded. Under the streetlights, the resplendent silhouette of the twin lances appeared. Slightly later than the chariot which dashes across the skies, it was Lancer. Finally, the three-Servant anti-Caster alliance had assembled.

“If he would just show his Noble Phantasm, I can destroy his technique with a blow from my Gáe Dearg.....Naturally, I don't think that guy would easily allow that to happen.”

“Lancer, you can hit Caster's Noble Phantasm from the river side by hurling the lance?”

At Saber's question, Lancer laughed audaciously.

“If only he would just show *that thing*, there won't be any trouble at all. You looking down on us lance-wielding heroic spirits?”

“Okay. So, Rider and I will cover the forefront. Is that all right, King of Conquerors?”

“I don't mind, but.....Even if my chariot doesn't need road to travel on, Saber, how do you plan to attack the enemy in the river?”

Being asked thus by Rider, this time it was Saber's turn to grin.

“This body of mine has received divine protection from the Lady of the Lake. Whatever the water is, there is nothing which can stop my advance.”

“Oh? That's something quite rare.....I really want you to join my men.”

At Rider's self-centered comment, saber whose beautiful eyebrows would usually ruffle, ignored him with a sharp glare instead.

“You will pay the price of that careless remark another time. Now, digging Caster out of the inside of the monster is the top priority.”

“Ha-ha, aye! Well then, let me strike the first blow.”

Together with his roar of laughter, Rider lashed at the oxen of his chariot, and dashed up to the empty sky with clapping thunders. Not caring at all about Waver's shrieks who apparently hadn't made the mental preparation, the King of Conquerors' galloping Noble Phantasm started the straight-on charge towards that gargantuan sea monster.

“Saber, good luck!”

Nodding at Irisviel who called out to her, the King of Knights leaped from the bank into the river again.

The shiny greaves hit the water surface, and silver splashes scattered in brilliance. But, the tips of her toes did not sink. With hardness identical to a ground, the water Saber stepped on accepted her sprint. It was just the miracle which could happen to the king due to the blessing of the Lady of the Lake.

As she got closer, the figure of the sea monster grew all the more. As if bending over towards Saber, it overwhelmed her with its odious dignity.

Like a group of snakes, the curvy tentacles which extended all over freely, stretched out to intercept the approaching King of Knights.

Nevertheless, neither its strangeness nor its odiousness could hinder her sprint. Right now, fear and impatience were the same in Saber's heart.

“Let's settle this, Caster!”

The beheading strike of the Barrier of the Wind King which was swung over her head with renewed fighting spirit, first hit the sea monster with a merciless stroke.

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Somewhere far away, within the thunderclouds of high altitudes at which not even birds fly, the voices of whispers being exchanged over digitally encrypted wireless radios could be heard.

“Control to Diablo I, come in!”

“This is Diablo I, loud and clear. Anything?”

“Request from Fuyuki city police for disaster relief operation. Stop patrolling immediately, get there now.”

“Disaster relief operation?” Hearing those words from the headphone, First Class Lieutenant Ōgi doubted his ears.

If it were helicopters or P3C, he could still understand. But a “disaster” which could call back an F15 fighter from its maritime border patrol, what on earth could it be?

“Control, clarifying order contents. What happened?”

At the other side of the wireless radio, there was a brief, awkward silence.

“……Ah, okay, don't laugh. Over there……a monster had appeared.”

To hear that in the cockpit of a subsonic cruising speed, it could be said to be a first-rate joke. Not laughing was an absurd request.

“That's the best! It was worthwhile for me to sign up for the air defense.”

“Anyway, it is an official order. Diablo I, observe and report the situation at Mion River.”

“……It's a joke right. Oi?”

“Diablo I, repeat.”

The irritated voice of the controller told him that he was dragged into this ridiculous prank too. Sighing, Captain Ōgi gave a fixed reply monotonously.

“Diablo I, roger that. This plane is on its way to Mion river mouth for scouting. Over!”

Despite that, Captain Ōgi had suddenly become inclined to believe the content of the conversation just now. When the thought that such absurd conversation might be recorded in the voice recorder crossed his mind, he felt an awkwardness as if he wanted to run away.

“……Diablo II, just like what was said. Turn back. Let's go back!”

“Roger. But……is that all right?”

The pilot of the consort plane, Diablo II- Third Class Lieutenant Kobayashi said that in a tone which did not hide his suspicion towards that absurd order.

Nonetheless, whether it was true or false, he had no choice but to carry out the orders relayed to him. At least, the only consolation was that his destination, Fuyuki city was on the air way back to his base. He didn't know who on earth would take responsibility for it, but for now. at least the jet fuel wasting due to needless loitering would be kept to a minimum.

“If there really is a monster, you'll give us the permission to fight?”

At Third Class Lieutenant Kobayashi's semi-desperate words, First Class Lieutenant Ōgi snorted again.

“If this is a monster film, we are surely the roles which will be *killed*. The underdogs from Ultraman.”

“That's not funny.”

In the navigators' hearts, with the thunderous roar of the afterburner, turning its silver wings over, the figure of the F15J was as gallant as usual.

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Archer looked down towards the distant, wave borne battle of Heroic Spirits from high in the air.

"What a disgraceful sight..."

The King of Heroes rode upon a shining bright ‘ark’ made of gold and emerald, 500 meters above the ground.

Gate of Babylon – the treasury of Gilgamesh, the primeval hero who once owned all of the treasures in the world, stored within it the original forms of many treasures that were praised by the legends and myths of latter men.

The golden ark that he is using to float in the air is also one of those 'divine secret treasures'. Indeed, this is the flying contraption that was passed from Babylon to India and recorded in the two epic sagas Ramayana and Mahabharata as the "Vimana".

"Although they’re mongrels, they are famous warriors at the very least… I wouldn’t have thought that they’ve fallen as low as joining together to finish that filthy thing. There should be a limit to deplorability. Don’t you think so, Tokiomi?"

In contrast with the languid and heedless Archer, Tōsaka Tokiomi, who was permitted to share a seat on the ark, had a heart full of anger and anxiety.

For the most part, magecraft has to be used in secret – it was indeed due to the need to obey this basic principle that the Tōsaka lineage was appointed this land's Second Owner by the Association. Caster's rampage not only threatens the progress of the Holy Grail War, it wholly tramples over even Tokiomi’s own prestige.

It would be a horrid tragedy if the liberated beast were to go mad again. If that happens, then the problem would no longer be a simple matter of finishing Caster's bounty, or properly conducting the Heaven’s Feel. Right now, this monster must be eliminated as soon as possible. The dignity of the Tōsaka name would be at stake if the number of witnesses increased.

"O King, that monster is an evil creature laying waste to your garden. A sinner that deserves death by any means!"

"That’s the work of the gardener."

Archer immediately rebuked Tokiomi’s request.

"Could it be, Tokiomi, that you regard this great treasure of mine as a gardener's hoe?"

"That is not what I meant! But as you can see – they won't be able to hold on much longer."

In truth, it is evident that the battle is progressing towards despair.

Although Saber and Rider’s blades continued to slash the sea demon’s gigantic body with no respite, it showed no signs of being wounded.

Of course, it wasn’t that the Servants were holding back. The unyielding sword that clove rocks and the iron hooves that brought forth roaring thunder; they ruthlessly carved out the sea demon’s flesh, scattering them about in waves of blood and decay. However, the shredded wounds would be filled up by new flesh in the blink of an eye.

The demonic monsters that Caster summoned and commanded previously also had physical regeneration abilities, so it was not surprising. However,

the giant sea demon this time was indeed enormous in size. It was as if they were digging a hole in a marsh; the damage of the two Servants combined cannot keep pace with the monster's regeneration.

Even the utmost effort and combined attacks of the King of Knights and King of Conquerors could only slow down the sea demon's progress towards the riverbank by a little.

"This is a great opportunity to display the majesty of a true hero. Please, give the command!"

The King of Heroes gave Tokiomi a glance of displeasure. Then he swung his right hand, which was propping up his chin on the edge of the ship. Four swords and spears appeared in the air next to him. The shining primeval Noble Phantasms unleashed a thunderous roar and flew to impale the filthy mountain of meat that wriggled down below.

Saber and Rider reacted immediately and jumped away to avoid being caught in the attack, but Caster’s sea monster was in no ways so agile. The four Noble Phantasms hit it head on. Their power, enough to split mountains, blew one-third of the giant beast’s body into nothingness.

It was an unprecedentedly mighty impact, but Caster laughed out loud with an even more piercing sound.

"How can it be...?"

Tokiomi was dumbfounded. Beneath him, the wriggling meat mountain swelled up like a balloon, and repaired the damaged parts as he watched.

The physical structure of the giant meat lump was perhaps as simple as an amoeba. It has no bones or organs, and thus no weaknesses. Its movement won’t be impaired no matter which body part is destroyed, and it will speedily restore the destroyed parts relying on its mighty regeneration ability.

" – We're leaving, Tokiomi. I can’t watch that filthy thing a second longer."

Archer spat out while his crimson irises expressed his revulsion.

"But... please wait, King of Heroes!"

"Tokiomi, I used four Noble Phantasms for your honor. I don’t want to take them back now that they’ve been touched and stained by that thing. Don’t take my leniency so cheaply."

"You are the only one who can defeat that monster!"

Tokiomi desperately persisted. As it had progressed into such a situation, he had no time to think about the prudence a liege should have.

"With a regeneration ability of this level, we can only destroy it entirely with one blow. The only one who can do this is you, the King of Heroes, and the Sword of Rupture – "

"Fool!"

This time it was Archer who raged, his pupils a burning crimson.

"Draw my greatest treasure, Ea, here? You are senseless, Tokiomi! I should take your head for speaking such rash words to the King!"

"..."

Tokiomi lowered his gaze, grinding his teeth, and stayed silent.

Indeed, it is impossible. With Gilgamesh's pride, he would only draw his trump card, his cherished blade, when facing an opponent whom he recognizes as 'fitting.'

However, there was no other way to completely destroy Caster's sea demon. That was also the truth.

He was forcibly reminded of the Command Seals on his right hand. Even if he uses one here, he can obtain another one from the Holy Church as the reward for defeating Caster. However – this kind of choice would definitely cause the relationship between the King of Heroes and himself to shatter.

Since that's the case, he could only place his hope on other Servants.

...And if Caster is successfully destroyed by the other Servants, Masters other than Tokiomi would gain the additional Command Seals held by Father Risei.

The constrained anger caused Tokiomi to clutch his hands into fists. His nails dug into his palm.

Why did things progress toward such an unexpected direction? It was supposed to be a perfectly planned and prepared Heaven's Feel, so how did it turn into such a mad and chaotic situation?

At that moment, a thunderous sound tore apart the sky. Tokiomi lifted his head stiffly.

The lightless thunder could only be the residual noise of a sonic boom. The paired lights that flew across the night sky, north to south, were the identification lights of jet-propelled fighter aircraft.

"Damn it..."

The situation was deteriorating rapidly with every passing moment. For Tōsaka Tokiomi, the Second Owner of Fuyuki, there was nothing he could do except to look on.

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The strange scene spread below them shocked the two Eagles speechless.

"... What, is that...?"

Captain Ōgi raked his brain and considered the possibility that his eyes were playing tricks on him. Beyond that, he was doubting even his own sanity.

"And there's some strange lights at six o’clock. It's not a helicopter... is it a UFO or something?"

The stunned voice of his wingman, 2nd Lieutenant Kobayashi, coming through the wireless made the situation clear. This wasn’t an illusion that only Captain Ōgi could see.

"Control to Diablo I. Situation report."

"The situation – it's, uh – "

How can he explain this?

Disaster? Unknown craft? Airspace intrusion?

Monster – no, that can’t be considered. There isn't a codeword for that.

In order to explain this, it must be built upon the foundation of current knowledge. However, such knowledge far surpassed Captain Ōgi's capacity of thought.

"I'll go a bit lower to look at it closely."

"Wait – Kobayashi, hold it!"

A nameless evil chill descended upon his back; Captain Ōgi reflexively tried to stop his wingman. However, Kobayashi's F15 had moved from circling to actual descent.

"Pull back! Diablo II!"

"If we observe it a bit closer, then we can know – "

At this moment, the two fighter jets were no longer onlookers.

The opponent wasn't a modern weapon like anti-aircraft artillery or missiles, so Lieutenant Kobayashi had no way to estimate the range of the enemy's attacks. And first of all, it would be impossible to react to tentacles that can stretch over 100 meters in the blink of an eye.

He couldn't figure out what was happening even after the he lost control of the stick. It was as if he smacked into an invisible wall and spiraled into a fall. All he could do was scream.

Although he died this way, it may still be somewhat fortunate compared to what Captain Ōgi was seeing.

Numerous thick and robust web-like extensions stretched out from the surface of the meat lump on the river and entangled Kobayashi's craft, forcibly dragging the plane down despite the turbofan engine's thrust. Such a scene can only be called a nightmare.

The plane didn't explode when it smashed into the meat lump. The F15, reduced into scrap iron, sank deeply into the gigantic primeval creature and was swallowed with not a single fragment left.

"Kobayashi – "

Having witnessed everything, Captain Ōgi's mind had gone over the ultimate limit of thought and comprehension and was left solely with a perception alien to common sense.

Ah, it – *was swallowed*.

"Control to Diablo I. What's going on?! Report!"

"Eyes, it has eyes, so many eyes..."

Despite the thick mist Captain Ōgi still saw, very clearly, those wart-like eyes that emerged on the surface of the meat lump, which all opened at the same time and stared at the prey in the air above them.

Captain Ōgi could feel that ‘gaze’ even in the airtight cockpit.

That was it. That thing was unimaginably hungry. It focused on the next prey after its swallowed Diablo II, and kept a death glare on it...

However, overwhelming horror instead exploded into violent anger.

" – Diablo I, engaging!"

"W-wait, Ōgi! Just what is – "

He forcibly turned off the noisy radio communication and disengaged all safeties. 4 AIM-7F/M Sparrows. 4 AIM-9 Sidewinders. 940 rounds for the M61 Vulcan. All in premium condition.

Kill it before he gets swallowed.

Ōgi's lips twisted with mad laughter, having lost all normal capacities of thought. At the control column of a F15, the most powerful fighter jet in the world, he was the true God of Death.

Must avenge Kobayashi... rip that thing to shreds, then burn it to ashes.

He turned the plane around, locking onto the target with the HUD reticle. He would never miss with such a giant enemy. A saturation run, firing all weapons at once –

Powerful tremors rocked the plane’s body.

Right behind him – Ōgi battle instincts, pushed to the limit, told him this. However, judging from its results, his sudden turn to look behind him delivered the final blow to his already half-shattered consciousness.

An inky-black figure suddenly appeared on the other side of the canopy, fully exposed to the subsonic convection currents at the back of the plane. Behind his obscuring helmet, his gleaming eyes emanated blazing fire, and his gaze harbored endless hatred and madness as he stared intently into the cockpit.

In the sealed, radio-silent iron coffin, Captain Ōgi gave a final hoarse scream that reached no one.

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"That's..."

Tōsaka Tokiomi, his sight reinforced with magecraft, watched the F15 streaking through the air.

The shadow that suddenly appeared on the back of the plane, armored in dully shimmering titanium... only a Servant is capable of something like that. Judging from its appearance, it must be the Berserker mentioned in Kirei's reports.

The blackness on the armor corrupted the fighter jet's outer shell drop by drop as if it was ink.

Indeed, it was Berserker's special ability that once robbed Archer's Noble Phantasms away and transformed even scrap iron into demonic swords and spears — perhaps that power allows him to use anything and everything that can be remotely conceptualized as a 'weapon'?

The black prana again corroded the sonic silver wings, and even that epitome of modern science was instantly changed it into a monstrous form.

"■■■■■■■□□□■■!"

The twenty-meter-long craft having completely fallen under his control, the black knight lightly gripped its back like a dragon rider of legend. His howl, full of vengeance, reverberated through the night sky.

Tokiomi had already been informed by Kirei about the primary targets of Berserker and its Master.

Unexpectedly, the fiendish steel bird, now completely corroded by the pitch-black prana, turned its nose and charged directly towards Archer's airborne Vimana.

"Oho, is it that mad dog again...? Interesting."

Different from the initial battle at the warehouse district, Archer smiled wickedly and rose to Berserker's challenge. Tokiomi had no idea about what may have changed the King of Heroes' thoughts, and he didn't want to ponder about it either.

After all, Tokiomi had already vowed in the past to defeat that enemy with his own hands. He wasn't put off with doing it himself as the other man was an opponent who had more or less troubled him personally.

Standing at the edge of the ark, Tokiomi looked towards the highest vantage point in the area, which would be the ideal spot to spy upon Tokiomi's group — as expected, on the high-rise apartment complex where he locked his gaze, the opponent he wished for appeared.

That man stood there, this time with no intention of concealing himself.

The left side of his face was like a corpse, distorted and stiff with pain. His right eye was like a devil's, burning with the flames of hatred.

His eyes crossed with Tokiomi's and wordlessly declared battle.

"O' King, let me be the master’s opponent."

"Very well. You can have your fun."

The Vimana glided through the air and brought Tokiomi right above his target. It would be approximately an eighty-meter descent. For a magus, such a distance is nothing to be afraid of.

"The fortunes of war upon us."

Tokiomi took his staff Mystic Code, smoothed the edge of his overcoat, and fearlessly leapt down from the sky.

Alone on the Vimana, Archer gazed at the pursuing steel shadow, his eyes burning with a sadistic light.

"A despicable and lowly dog only fit to prostrate on the ground now soaring into the heavens where kings dance... Even as a jester you are beyond help, mongrel!"

He unleashed Gate of Babylon, throwing out a continuous attack of six Noble Phantasms. Sparking with blinding brilliance, spears and blades charged to meet Berserker like comets, trailed by light.

The twin turbofan engine, receiving Berserker's alien power, gave off a monstrous roar. The black F15 used its acceleration to exponentially increase its relative velocity, breaking through a gap in the tightly knit screen of Noble Phantasms.

However, Archer's Noble Phantasms did not lose their lethality simply because they were avoided. Three out of the six - an axe, a scythe, and a scimitar - immediately spun, changing direction and closing in on the F15's tail.

Just as they were about to hit, the black F15 writhed its ailerons and flaps like a living creature, escaping the blade edges of Archer's Noble Phantasms with aerodynamically impossible abruptness. With a second, then a third barrel roll, the barrage of Noble Phantasms scattered away into the sky. The intense G's of the first spin was enough to instantly kill Captain Ōgi in the cockpit, rupturing his internal organs; but of course, this was just a trifle for Berserker.

As soon as it dodged all the attacks, the F15 forcibly performed an Immelmann Turn and aimed its nose towards Archer, the pylons under its wings sputtering the flames of rocket motors. Two Sparrow missiles attacked Archer's Vimana with vengeance.

Although ordinary weapons would be useless in a battle of Servants, the weapons that Berserker corroded were of a different caliber. Carrying the prana of hatred, every single shot of the twenty-six-pound explosives had an annihilating might.

"How impertinent..."

Archer boldly smiled and placed his hand on the Vimana's helm. Immediately, the ark of light accelerated and evaded the missiles' attack with an elegance that Berserker's brute force control can never compare with. The legendary flying Noble Phantasm, crossing the sky at the speed of thought, has already surpassed the laws of physics.

"□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□!!"

The mad black knight roared. As if echoing his malicious call, the front stabilizers of the two Sparrows suddenly twisted and once again they bared their fangs towards the Vimana which had evaded the first attack. Even the electronic radar-guided missiles have been transformed into magic weapons that chased the subject of Berserker's hatred like hounds.

However, Archer sneered at the incoming threat, deploying Gate of Babylon once again. He took out two shields and stood them in the sky, striking

down the cursed missiles. With the ark shaking with the impact of the explosion, the red eyes of the King of Heroes were gradually stained with a shade of fanaticism.

"Interesting… I haven't played like this for a long time. Even a mere wild beast can make me so pleased!"

Archer's laughter raised as the Vimana's altitude sharply increased. Berserker's F15 once again gave pursuit, clawing at its back. The two instantly broke through the sound barrier, falling up through the sea of clouds in the night sky, climbing ever higher as the dogfight continued.

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The thick evening mist enveloped the icy air as Tōsaka Tokiomi descended from the sky.

For a proficient magus, a controlled descent through manipulating mass and air currents is nothing too difficult. Or perhaps it should be said that the degree of proficiency is determined by the elegance of its execution.

Maintaining an absolutely vertical and straight path, landing as lightly as feather with his clothes and hair completely unruffled — an ordinary magus would definitely give a heartfelt praise upon seeing such an exemplary and skilled move like Tokiomi's.

But Matō Kariya had already transformed into something else. There was absolutely no respect or admiration towards magecraft in his heart.

Respect had turned into hatred; admiration had turned into anger. For Kariya, whose body was twisted into a thing ugly beyond comparison, Tokiomi's elegance and flamboyance deserve to be cursed.

You bastard — you are always like this no matter what.

His speech, his manners, and that royal disposition - this man has been 'perfect' ever since the day he appeared before Aoi and Kariya. That elegance and ease had always made Kariya feel the difference in their 'ranks'.

However, that will end tonight.

Elegance, something that this man paid the most attention to, is nothing on the battlefield where every man slaughtered one other. Now, right here, the Tōsaka family creed that was held in such pride will be dragged through the mud, destroyed...

Berserker, already in battle, began to mercilessly wring Kariya out of his prana. The agonizing pain caused by the maddening activity of the crest worms inside him was as if his hands and feet were being slashed by razors. His bones were rent, his eyes blurred.

However, such a pain is nothing when compared to the hatred that tore and gnawed at Kariya's heart.

" □ It looks like you've changed, Matō Kariya."

Sharp, narrowing eyes that looked as though they were pitying; Tōsaka Tokiomi's showed his ease before battle and deliberately taunted Kariya.

"Discarding the way of magecraft, yet still longing after the Holy Grail and even returning to it in a form like this... Your shameful sight alone would be enough to cause slander of degradation of the Matō family."

Kariya replied with a mocking laugh. The sound that emerged from his mouth sounded like the chirping of insects even to himself.

"Tōsaka Tokiomi, I'll only ask you one thing... Why did you hand Sakura to Zōken?"

"...What?"

Tokiomi furrowed his brows when he heard this completely unexpected question.

"Is this a question you should care about at this time?"

"Answer me, Tokiomi!"

Tokiomi sighed and said to the agitated Kariya.

" □ You should know it without needing to ask. I only want my beloved daughter to have a happy future."

"What... did you, say?"

Upon receiving this incomprehensible reply, Kariya's brain momentarily blanked out. While Kariya froze, Tokiomi continued with an indifferent tone.

"Any magus with a second child would be troubled – the secret craft can only be passed on to one of them. This is a dilemma where one of the children must fall into mediocrity."

Mediocrity □

That word echoed in Kariya's empty mind. Sakura, who has lost her smile, and the image of Rin playing with Aoi... Tokiomi's words mixed into his few happy memories.

The image of the mother and her daughters from so long ago □ did this man cleave it apart and discarded it just with the word 'mediocrity'?

"This is especially so since my wife is very outstanding as a mothering body. Both Rin and Sakura are born with equal and rare natural talents. Both daughters must have the protection of a house of magi.

Robbing away one's potential for the other's future □ no father would hope for such a tragedy to occur."

Kariya couldn't understand the reasons flowing out of Tokiomi □ no, he didn't want to understand. He felt that he was going to start throwing up on the spot if he understood just a small part of this magus' philosophy.

"The only thing to do in order to preserve both sisters' talents is to give one away for adoption. Old man Matō's request was a godsend. As a house that knows of the Holy Grail's existence, the possibility of reaching 'Akasha' is even higher. Even if I can't complete it, there's still Rin, and if Rin fails there's still Sakura; someone will always inherit the Tōsaka family's wish."

"You bastard..."

How can he speak of such a despairing truth with a still expression?

If they both walk the road leading to 'Akasha', then □

"...You want them to fight each other? Sister against sister?!"

Faced with Kariya's accusation, Tokiomi gave an unbidden laugh and nodded with a cold expression.

"Even if such a situation is to result, it is still happiness to the remnants of my house. If we succeed, the glory will be in our own hands; even if we fail, the glory will belong to our ancestral name. There is no such thing as a confrontation without sorrow."

"You're insane!"

Faced with Kariya, who was gritting his teeth, Tokiomi merely gave a cold glance and called out mockingly.

"It's a waste to tell you anyways. You are someone who doesn't understand the nobility of the way of magecraft at all, and had left the way and betrayed the art."

"Bullshit!"

Hatred and anger, surpassing their uttermost limit, stimulated the crest worms within Kariya into life. An evil chill and agonizing pain passed through his entire body. Even so, it is a blessing for the current Kariya.

Erode me, devour my body. Let all the prana created thus become a curse for my nemesis...

Worms slithered out from the shadows around them like galloping waves and gathered to one place. These are disgusting crawling worms that looked like maggots and have the size of mice. All of these were the fangs Kariya acquired from Matō Zōken before Kariya became a Master □ weapons to deal with battles outside the laws of the ordinary world.

"I won't forgive any of you... you disgusting magi...!

I'll kill you! And Zōken! Kill until none of you are left!!"

The worms that took in Kariya's hatred twitched and twisted together in agony. Soon shimmering, steely shells and wings emerged from cracks straight down their backs.

One by one □ the slithering worms metamorphosed into giant beetles, which buzzed as they spread their wings and formed battalions as they flew around Kariya. A giant group amassed in the blink of an eye. These 'blade wing worms' adjusted into battle formation as they grinded their sharp jaws threateningly and ferociously. As a worm-user, this is Matō Kariya's deadliest hand.

Tōsaka Tokiomi's expression was still impassive, faced with a mass of carnivorous worms that could devour a bull and crush even its bones in an instant.

His level as a magus was far above Kariya, after all. Therefore, the suicidal secret craft that Kariya released was neither awe-inspiring nor frightening

for Tokiomi. He could even spite this mockery of fate with ease in this battle to decide the victor between two former rival suitors.

" □ From the moment a magus is born, he is someone that has 'power'. And some day, he will achieve a 'greater power'. This responsibility was already flowing in his 'blood' before he realized this destiny. That is what it means to be born into this world as the child of a magus."

Tokiomi said coldly as he lifted his Mystic Code and unleashed the craft of fire from the giant ruby embedded into its head.

The defensive form that traced the Tōsaka family crest in the air turned into crimson flames and burned the night air. This is an aggressive defense that will burn everything it touches to ashes; even to him, it feels childish to use this against a complete novice of an enemy, but he had no intention of holding back.

After all □

"The Matō magecraft was passed into Sakura's hands because you refused to inherit the family headship. I have to thank you on that point... however, I would never forgive a man like you. Escaping from the responsibility of your blood is a weakness, a vile behavior which can never be overlooked. Matō Kariya is a disgrace to the way of magecraft. Since we have met once again, I will have to exterminate you."

"Enough nonsense... you inhuman bastard..."

"You're wrong. Being responsible for yourself is the first requirement of being human. If you can't even do this, then you are only fit to be a dog, Kariya."

"O' worms, devour him, tear him apart!"

The dancing, scorching flames confronted the howling hive of insects.

The third deathmatch of the night had begun.

-84:25:22[

"That's... awesome! Totally awesome!"

Uryū Ryūnosuke was so overwhelmed with excitement that, heedless of his surroundings, he raised his voice to a strange shriek, his whole body shaking.

Although he was not alone with the crowd of onlookers now gathering at the riverside, none of them were concerned with Ryūnosuke's odd behavior. Every set of eyes were fixed on the otherworldly, impossible phenomenon unfolding before them.

On the river's surface, a giant rampaging monster. In the sky, sparks flew as a UFO clashed with a Self Defense Force fighter.

A spectacle never before seen that anyone would deride as hackneyed.

Serves you all right! Ryūnosuke cheered.

With their mouths agape, everyone present stared dumbly at the reality in front of their eyes. At their wit's end, the only thing they could do was watch as 'common sense', the worthless idol they had blindly worshiped and utterly believed in, loudly came crashing down.

How's that, you bastards? It's always been me on the losing side, until now. Frustrating, isn't it? Pathetic, eh?

None of you even imagined - didn't even try to imagine - how awesome and bizarre the world is outside the walls of common sense.

But me? Of course, I know. I've expected it; hoped for it. That someday, I can see something tremendous. That's why I only ever do the abnormal, seeking out novelties every day, wandering in a frenzy.

And — I've finally found it. The treasure chest I've been seeking for.

Yeah, God definitely exists. This extraordinary sight is my proof.

The one who brought out such absurdities just to see the trembling expressions of his pitiful lambs was the great Trickster in His heaven. The God he had been seeking all along finally appeared; all the prepared jack-in-the-boxes, set up in this place and that, all opened at once and spouted flames.

This is a farewell to tedium. There is no longer a need to devote time and effort into murder. Even if it's left alone, tons of people are going to die. Crushed and ripped apart and smashed open and devoured and die and die and die endlessly. The color of a blonde’s guts, the sensation of a black man's spleen, even those bowels that I haven't seen before; I can experience

them one after another! Day by day, I'll be swept up in interesting things, right in the center of the world!

Continuously, ceaselessly!

“Aaaahhh! The Lord has come! The Lord has come!”

He raised his fists high in triumph, singing and springing and celebrating this victory of a lifetime. Ryūnosuke shouted encouragements to his comrade who had become the rampaging monster.

“Go for it, Sir Bluebeard! Destroy them! Slaughter them! This is God's own toy box!”

Just then, he was shoved hard by an unseen hand.

Falling painfully on his backside, he looked around, shocked. Nobody was near enough to touch Ryūnosuke. On the contrary, the people around him started to scream and back away when they saw him. It was as though he was one of the absurdities in the river and in the sky, appearing right before their eyes.

“What is it? Hey, what?"

Just as Ryūnosuke expectantly started asking the people around him where this new oddity was occurring, he casually put his hand to his stomach and felt something hot and slippery... and then, he started fixedly at his own hand, dyed crimson.

“Whoa..."

Red. Pure, captivating red.

The glistening, vivid, fundamental color that he had always been seeking.

Ah, this is it — Ryūnosuke instantly understood, a faint smile on his pale lips.

The color he was searching for all along. The thing he teared through all sorts of places to find but could never obtain, the true "red".

Lovingly, he embraced his abdomen, gushing with fresh blood.

“I see..... I never realized, huh.....”

"The darkest place is under the candlestick" - those words were well said. He had never thought that what he was seeking could be hidden somewhere so near himself...

He was intoxicated, his skull completely filled by the surging analgesia. The second shot struck him in the center of the forehead.

Even though his entire head above the nose had been blown away without a trace, his lips still traced a smile of total bliss.

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Got him — confident, Emiya Kiritsugu, kneeling on one knee on the deck of the ship, lowered the muzzle of the Walther night vision sniper rifle.

He was about two hundred meters downstream from Caster's monster, close to the heart of the river at Fuyuki Bridge. Kiritsugu, who happened to have been staking out the harbor just as Caster appeared, promptly chose one of nearby empty yachts and commandeered it, arriving here.

Needless to say, it never crossed his mind to attack the monster Caster had become. Using the panic as cover, Kiritsugu's aim once again was to 'hunt' the Master.

The light amplification scope loses its efficiency as the number of particles in the air increased, making it useless in this fog; however, this was no trouble for the infrared scope, crucial for differentiating magi. Within the gathering crowd of onlookers, Kiritsugu searched for the thermal pattern characteristic of Magic Circuits. As a result, one of those individuals was gunned down.

Under these circumstances, anyone loitering near the riverside while keeping Magic Circuits active must be involved in the Holy Grail War.

The probability of his target being the Master of Caster was over sixty percent. For now, taking the shot was the right choice.

Incidentally, due to Kiritsugu's position, the two warring magi on top of the nearby high-rise apartment were in a blind spot and spared from his gunshots.

"……This is bad."

Although that particular incident was resolved successfully, Kiritsugu's expression soured as he turned around and confirmed the situation.

No matter how favorably he looked at it, Saber and Rider's strenuous attempt to halt the sea monster was going poorly.

Even presuming that he had hit his target, it still requires a certain amount of time before the Servant, cut off from a prana supply, becomes unable to maintain its link to the modern era and disappear. If Caster reaches the bank and begins 'feeding' before this happens, that would be the end. Once it gains a new prana source, they would have no choice but to eliminate it physically.

And finally, the immortal, infinitely regenerating monster is on the verge on pushing onto the shallow riverside.

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Despite grinding her teeth in despair, Saber was neither frightened nor daunted, and continued to brandish her sword.

No matter how deep her slashes, the wound would be filled instantly without a trace. This was a fruitless effort — no, if they could just slow the monster down even by a little this battle would have meaning. However, when the impending outcome is considered, this equates to no more than futile resistance.

If only she could use her left hand...

Although it was an unavoidable regret, Saber could not help but consider it. Even with the exceptionally powerful Noble Phantasms possessed by Rider and Archer, it will not be enough to fell this monster. No matter how large a force they use to trample it, it is meaningless if all its injuries can be regenerated from instantly. To defeat this horror, one must simply deliver a strike that covers it entirely, obliterating it down to the last scrap of flesh — what is needed is not an Anti-Army, but an Anti-Fortress Noble Phantasm.

Excalibur could achieve this, but Saber could not use it now. The fatal secret technique which releases in a single blow an enormous surge of energy rivaling her entire prana supply; no matter the circumstance, for her to use it, she must swing the sword with both hands.

Naturally, it would risk Saber's pride for her to face Lancer now and complain to him at great length about this - impossible to even consider. The handicap of her left hand is her debt for vowing to settle her match with Lancer fairly. In the Einzbern forest, Lancer came of his own free will to 'serve as her left hand'; in the name of the King of Knights, she must repay him for his spirit.

"Hey, Saber! We'll accomplish nothing like this. Retreat for now!"

At Rider's voice coming from his chariot directly above her, Saber replied angrily.

"What nonsense are you speaking! If we do not stop it here — "

"This is a stalemate! Just pull back. I have an idea!"

"..."

She was compelled. Delivering a blow with all her strength as a parting gift, Saber dashed across the river's surface in pursuit of Rider and retreated to the riverside where Lancer and Irisviel were waiting. Saber kicked off from the water and leapt onto the riverbank. At the same time, Rider's chariot landed, descending from empty space accompanied by lightning.

"Listen, all of you. No matter what steps we take after this, right now we have to buy some time."

Dispensing with greetings, Rider spoke urgently. Even the King of Conquerors did not maintain his easygoing composure this time.

"For the time being I'll drag that thing into Ionian Hetairoi. Well, it'll probably be impossible to destroy it completely even with my elites. Confining it in my Reality Marble is the best I can do."

"What do we do after that?"

At Lancer's question,

"No idea."

Rider replied blankly. Nevertheless, from his grave expression, it is obvious that he was not joking.

Buying time to stave off an emergency — even with the King of Conquerors' hidden technique, this was all that could be done.

"After taking in such a giant, I can maintain my bounded field of troops for a few minutes at most. During that time, by any means possible — Heroic Spirits, find a strategy that will grant us victory. Boy, you stay here too."

As soon as he finished, Rider plucked Waver out of the charioteer's carriage.

"H-Hey?!"

"Once the bounded field is deployed, I will have no way of knowing the situation outside. Boy, if something happens, concentrate and call me. I'll dispatch a messenger to you."

"..."

Though they were allied right now, from Waver's perspective, having him and his own Servant go separate ways and leaving himself alone with two other Servants was extremely dangerous and reckless. However, nothing can be resolved if they all simply stood on guard against their allies' treachery.

Though his heart was quivering with fear, with a sullen look, the youth nodded.

"Saber, Lancer, the rest is up to you two."

"...Got it."

"...Understood."

Though the two had spoken in agreement, they were both extremely bitter. Everyone present understood that Rider's decision was simply an emergency reaction without an actual solution.

Nevertheless, it was as though he placed his full trust in the Heroic Spirits he had appraised. After gathering his resolve, Rider aimed the chariot at the savage giant monster, and charged - without distress on his face, without once looking back.

-84:23:46

Although Archer had somewhat enjoyed this original game for a while, he soon grew bored of the aerial battle after the third, then fourth exchange of the endless Holy Phantasms and missiles.

Finally, in this repetitive dogfight, Archer's Vimana was in a position pursuing Berserker's F15. If he reduced the distance between them a bit more, he would be in a perfect position to attack. Aware of this, Berserker pulled further from his pursuer, pushing his craft to full throttle, then using the acceleration from his descent to perform what is known as a full vertical descent.

“Stop your useless struggle...”

Archer accelerated the Vimana while chuckling and was once again in Berserker's tail effortlessly. In the blink of an eye, the two shot through the clouds, falling back down to the flickering lights of Fuyuki.

“I might as well plunge you headlong into the dirt. How does that sound, mongrel?”

Archer arranged his prepared Noble Phantasms into a torus shape, restraining Berserker in every direction and sealing off his path of retreat. Due to this, the only route Berserker could take was straight down, towards the Mion river - on a collision course with Caster's sea monster, which was creeping towards the riverbank.

As if trying to soften the impact of the inevitable collision, even by a little, the F15 opened all its flaps. Clawing at the atmosphere, it tried for maximum deceleration.

It was at that instant that that huge lump of meat disappeared.

At point-blank range, Rider shouted and activated Ionian Hetairoi. Archer and Berserker knew not the reason behind the fact that Rider and his subordinate Servants drew in the gigantic sea monster within the expanded Reality Marble. Nevertheless, not wanting them to be stained by another drop of mud, Archer foresaw the timing of the collision, and dematerialized his Noble Phantasms. With no intent of missing this chance, the demonic F15 twisted its nose upwards just before it touched the surface of the water and escaped the crash with an almost-perpendicular course.

Causing curtains of water to rise up on both sides due to the shockwave, the black F15 glided on the river, almost touching the water, and passed by the Servants observing the progress from the riverbank. At that moment, the shining figure of the knight, coated in silver and azure armor, was clearly burned into the mad dark knight's eyes.

"..."

Within that black helmet, the pair of eyes which brimmed with stagnant hatred, fiercely burned like a crimson blaze.

Based on Tōsaka Tokiomi's standards, this is too crude to be called a battle of magecraft - it was nothing but a comical farce.

Tokiomi was just disinterestedly maintaining his defensive boundary, having not yet executed a move that could be considered an attack. In spite of that his opponent, Matō Kariya, was already at the verge of death.

It was complete self-destruction. For Kariya right now, the act of using magecraft is itself a self-inflicted fatal injury. Even though Kariya himself must realize this, he foolishly continued using magecraft beyond his limit without hesitation. As a result, he had no choice but to pay the obvious price.

Even with a glance one could tell he was in a dire state. The capillaries all over his body were continually rupturing, and even now, they incessantly splashed out blood. He could not stand straight, and his staggering figure was like someone drowning clumsily in a bloody mist. With his eyes stretched wide open due to intense pain, one could not tell if there was still any sense left in him.

You were raging so passionately just now... and when the lid is opened, this is your condition?

The saddest thing above all else was that, despite utilizing such prana that it shaved off his own life, Kariya's attacks did not scathe even a hair on Tokiomi.

The summer insects which flew into the fire – they were like the proverbial stage show. The swarms of beetles simply charged endlessly straight into Tokiomi's incendiary boundaries, without even one breaking through and all of them scorched to ashes. To begin with, the act of challenging the flames directly in a frontal assault is exceedingly stupid for a bug user. Yet, Kariya did not slow his assault. Reducing his own lifespan, he fruitlessly spurred on the insects, turning them to cinders.

This was beyond laughable. At this utterly powerless enemy, Tokiomi had surpassed disdain and now felt pity. Before long, the flames will burn away all of Kariya's insects. At that point, Kariya would probably die wretchedly, unable to withstand the agony. Tokiomi merely had to focus on maintaining

his craft while calmly observing him. This fight will end within this impregnable fortress.

However, for Tokiomi who followed the noble path of magecraft, the disgraceful behavior of a corrupted magus who has fallen - and worse, having it displayed in front of him - was too unpleasant for him.

"Intensive Einäscherung..."

Responding to the two-line spell, the flames of the defensive boundary curled like a snake, stretching towards Kariya. To begin with, whether or not this instant-made magus knows the correct principles to counter an offensive spell is itself a subject of doubt.

"I... I'LL KILL YOU... TOKIOMI... ZŌ-KE-N..."

Despite being burned alive, Kariya did not scream; in its place, he merely repeated an endless murmur of curses. With his body been devoured from the inside by worms, it's possible that he no longer had a sense of pain to feel the heat with.

As he writhed with flames enveloping his body, he broke through the fence, stepped over the edge of the roof, and dropped into the darkness of the alley below.

Finally, after cleanly sweeping away all the remaining bugs there with his conflagration, Tokiomi undid his craft and sighed, fixing his collar.

The corpse - will not need a confirmation. Even if there was still breath in him, he would not last long. After this, he only had to wait for the annihilation of Berserker to come naturally from losing his contractor.

At first, Tokiomi only expected that the Matō would resign and let pass the Heaven's Feel of this cycle. He could not understand at all the intention behind sending the disinherited outcast Kariya as an improvised Master. In the end, Tokiomi did not understand what Kariya had wanted that caused him to hasten and join the war.

A victory without any sense of achievement and trailed by a bitter taste; without sparing another worrying thought, Tokiomi turned towards the river, and began examining the battles that raged around Caster.

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Thanks to Rider's clever scheme, the gigantic sea monster had disappeared without a trace from the water's surface. However, although its form was nowhere to be seen, the Servants and magi gathered there could clearly perceive the presence of the monster raging within the plane-divergent bounded field.

"... What should we do?"

Unable to withstand the creeping weight of the silence, Waver opened his mouth.

"He said he was buying time, but if we don't think of something in the meanwhile, we'll end up where we started. Hey, Einzbern, don't you have any ideas?!"

"Even if you say that..."

From Irisviel's chest, an out-of-place, frivolous electronic sound started beeping. Irisviel herself was taken aback, and she hastily took out the source of that sound.

Her mobile phone. It was something she received from Kiritsugu in case of emergencies. Obviously, there was no need to guess who the caller was. Nevertheless, as a situation where they would use this to converse was considered impossible, due to the urgency, Irisviel temporarily forgot the method of usage she was supposed to have remembered.

"Ummm, ah... What, should I do with this?"

She could only ask Waver, who was standing next to her. Irritated at the interruption to their conversation, Waver snatched the noisy phone from Irisviel's hand, pressed the Receive button and held it to his ear. Although he was a magus, Waver came from a family which did not adhere to formalities, and he was competent with machines to the degree of an ordinary person.

"Iri?"

Now it was Waver's turn at confusion, as a low male voice came from the other side of the conversation. He had wanted to return it to the owner after receiving the call but ended up answering it instead.

"Err, no, I'm..."

"Hm? ...I see, Rider's Master, huh. Just as well. I need to talk to you."

"W-Who are you?"

"It doesn't matter. Caster disappearing, that was your Servant's handiwork, right?"

"...Well, yes."

"Then I have a question. When Rider releases the Reality Marble, can he drop the contents at a specific place?"

It was a question without a clear purpose, but it was a race against time, and there wasn't time to ask the questioner's motives. Waver racked his brain for the fundamental laws governing Reality Marbles that he had learnt at the Clock Tower, put it together with the properties of Ionian Hetairoi which he had witnessed only once, and gave a cautious reply.

"It should be possible, to a certain extent, probably 100 meters at most. The prerogative for their reappearance lies with Rider."

"That will do. After this, I will choose a time and send up signal flares. Release Caster directly under it. Can you do that?"

"..."

The problem now was communicating this to Rider within the bounded field, but come to think of it, Rider had said that he would send a messenger afterward. Rider is probably still conscious of the link between the inside and outside of the field.

"I can... I think. Probably."

Even so, who is he talking with? He is likely someone from Einzbern's side, but from the way he talked, Waver had no choice but to conclude that he was watching from somewhere nearby.

"One more thing. Tell Lancer this: Saber's left hand contains an anti-fortress noble phantasm."

"Huh?"

Increasingly confused, Waver returned a question, but the conversation was quickly cut, leaving only static.

"What happened?"

Feeling the meaningful gaze from Waver, Lancer asked him with suspicion.

"Um... there's a message for you. 'Saber's left hand is an anti-fortress noble phantasm' or something..."

Lancer's expression changed to astonishment as Saber's simultaneously changed to awkwardness.

"Is that true, Saber?"

"..."

She wanted to avoid bringing up this topic here, but there's no use hiding it now. Dropping her face, Saber nodded silently.

"And... it can bring down Caster's monster in one blow?"

"It is possible. But..."

Nodding again, Saber stared straight at the Servant of the Spear with unwavering eyes and continued.

"Lancer, the weight of my sword is the weight of my pride. My injury from the fight with you is an honor, not a chain.

It is as you said in the forest. If I am backed by Diarmuid O'Duibhine as a substitute for my left hand, that alone is worth tens of thousands of men."

No good will come from making Lancer feel guilt at the point. As a comrade in the conducts of chivalry, in the end, Saber wanted Lancer to welcome the conclusion without unnecessary binds.

Silent, as though he was looking through at the figures of Rider's army and the sea monster at the other side separate from this plane, Lancer squinted, staring at the river.

"... Hey Saber, I cannot forgive that Caster."

His low reply came softly. On the contrary, his bewitchingly beautiful eyes shone with determination.

"He treats other's despair as righteousness and rejoices at the propagation of fear. On my oath as a knight, that is an 'evil' which I cannot overlook."

Thrusting the red lance in his right hand into the ground and releasing it, Lancer tightly gripped the remaining yellow lance in the middle with both

his hands. At that moment, realizing and rejecting what the proud spearman was intending to do, Saber stared and shouted.

"Lancer, no!"

"Now, which is the one who must win? Is it Saber? Or Lancer? No, it is neither. The one thing that must claim victory here, is the 'chivalry' we serve - isn't that right, heroic spirit Artoria?"

After boasting with a nonchalant smile - Lancer divided the dual spears that make up his noble phantasms and broke it neatly in half without hesitation.

The enormous curse contained within Gáe Buidhe gushed out in a whirlwind and scattered before their eyes into nothingness. If one thought of it as a noble phantasm that was legend taken form, its figure disappeared far too swiftly.

Who would have thought that a Servant would destroy his own noble phantasm, his trump card to absolute victory, with his own hands? It wasn't just Saber, but also Irisviel and Waver who were struck speechless by Lancer's actions.

"I entrust my vow of victory in the King of Knight's stroke. I'm counting on you, Saber."

The feelings in her heart took form as Saber tightened her 'left hand', firmly and strongly. Released from the curse of mortality, the arm of the King of Knights recovered instantly, answering with unmistakable strength.

"It's a deal, Lancer... Right now, I swear upon victory by my sword!"

The Barrier of the Wind King unveiled. Blowing up torrents of wind, a golden sword revealed itself. As though congratulating the promised victory, the shining blade illuminated the darkness brilliantly.

"That's, from King Arthur's legend..."

Finally witnessing the sacred crown-jeweled sword in front of his eyes, Waver whispered, dumbfounded.

As if seeing the dawning light at the end of the long night, the impatience and anxiety lurking in their hearts were gently swept away by the radiance.

Yes- this is truly the knight's ideal.

It was the crystallization of everything etched in the hearts of those who were scattered at the radiance; those who were placed on the bloody hell called a battlefield, fully exposed to the fear of death and despair, and whom still cling to a desire: "to be exalted."

"We can win..."

Trembling with joy, Irisviel whispered ecstatically.

However, as though raising an objection to such a hope, a roar of repulsive malediction shook the night sky, and spread. No, the screaming, which was unlike a voice, could be none other than an explosive turbofan.

Looking up to the sky, Saber saw hatred incarnate. Riding on the steel bird tainted with jet black prana, the mad heroic spirit once again bared his fangs at the King of Knights.

"A—urrrrrrrrrrr!!"

Together with Berserker's bloodcurdling roar, flames spouted from the six barrels of the 20mm Vulcan autocannon.

-84:19:03

Emiya Kiritsugu clicked his tongue as he intently watched this unexpected turn of events.

The ship had already been anchored after moving to the appointed location, and the preparations for the engine-powered escape lifeboat loaded aboard were finished. Saber had also successfully regained her Noble Phantasm of certain kill; all that’s left was to summon Rider back and get him to free Caster's sea demon – just as he thought this, Berserker, as though he had somehow lost control of himself, suddenly shifted his focus, from the battle he had with Archer until now, to Saber.

However, now that he thought about it, this was already the second time that Saber was challenged by Berserker without reason. Even when they first met at the warehouse district, as soon as the black knight lost his target, he assaulted Saber like a starving beast. It could be passed off as a coincidence if it only happened once, but that can’t be said for a second

time. To begin with, he had suddenly changed targets while completely ignoring his initial target of Archer, who was still going strong.

Of course, even for Archer, boasting an extraordinary amount of pride, this outrage was an inexcusable disdain.

“Have you no control? Mad dog!”

Archer cursed as he accelerated Vimana and soon approached Berserker’s back, close enough that he could kill him for certain. There was now so little distance between them that the opponent would never be able to evade the barrage of Noble Phantasms from Gate of Babylon regardless of his transcendent mobility – however, this decision backfired on him.

From the underside of the F15's body, scorching fireballs, like will-o'-the-wisps, slowly scattered in succession, washing over the nose of the trailing Vimana.

“What!?”

Originally, this armament called a flare dispenser simply launched out decoy heat sources in order to throw off the enemy’s heat-seeking missiles. However, as a result of being eroded by Berserker’s prana and demonized, they have even transfigured into tracking incendiary weapons. Based on their dogfight up until now, Archer made the hasty conclusion that the enemy doesn’t have a way of attacking against an enemy behind him, and therefore couldn’t cope in time to this unexpected counterattack. The bow of the Vimana plunged into the hive of roaring fire balls, lost control while surrounded by the crimson flames, and fell towards the surface of the river in a spiral.

Although he finally obtained the result of felling Archer, Berserker thought nothing of it right now. The fiendish steel bird did not even confirm the whereabouts of Archer after he sunk into the river, and with nothing but relentlessness, instead tracked down Saber and mercilessly poured down a rain of 20mm rounds.

For Saber, although the F15 that Berserker spurred on was a completely unknown weapon, her skill of sixth sense, equivalent to precognition, allowed her to comprehend with extreme accuracy the nature of this threat. Just before she was hit by the initial strafing run, Saber had sensed that this attack would result in wide-area destruction. Promptly realizing that Irisviel may be caught in the battle if she stayed on the riverbank, she once again leapt onto the water surface and sought a path of retreat on the river.

As this was an unavoidable decision, the result guided her to yet another dilemma.

By good command of footwork as a Servant, Saber would be able to rival a jet fighter in speed and galloped on top of the water. However, this vast river surface, with no obstacles at all, was undoubtedly the best hunting ground for the black knight who strafed down from the air above.

The bullets pouring out like torrential rain swept behind the galloping Saber, missing her by a hair, and scattered raging sheets of water like the streams of an upward waterfall.

Regardless of the size of the caliber, something on the level of *mere cannon shells* pose no threat to Servants at all. This is especially so with Saber, whose physical abilities would allow her to evade them with no difficulty, and even deflect the shots back with the blade of her sword if she wanted to. However – no matter how extraordinary the Heroic Spirit may be, the 12,000 rounds-per-minute of the pride of America's General Electric, the M61 autocannon, presented an unmanageable amount of shots. Worse yet, as a weapon carrying the properties of a Noble Phantasm due to Berserker's prana, a single shot would instantly be fatal.

"And I finally recovered my left hand…"

Saber was bitterly regretting. Even now, it would be possible for her to use her Noble Phantasm without hesitation and destroy Berserker in the air, but the enemy's tenacious and incessant attacks didn't allow her any opportunity to counterattack. Berserker's battle tactics were both accurate and prudent, as though he knew the full extent of Saber's abilities. In order to hunt a lion, the best method is to keep chasing it, not giving it a single chance to bare its fangs, strangling it; Berserker's skill was like that of a hunter who fully knew the essence of this.

Abruptly, restless tremors spread from the riverbank all the way into its surroundings. Only the magi present knew just what these unexplainable tremors meant – the epicenter was probably the inside of the Reality Marble that Rider expanded. The powerful quakes of the raging sea demon were finally beginning to affect normal space. It was an omen that Rider's Reality Marble was finally approaching its ultimate limit.

He must let Rider know of the situation here. Waver, after deciding as such, began to concentrate his thoughts to calling out his own Servant. Having no knowledge of telepathy, Waver could only rely on speech to come to a mutual understanding. However, Rider, who knew this, did say that 'I'll leave a herald for you".

The space beside Waver abruptly shook, and the form of a knight emerged.

“Mithrenes of the Hetairoi rides forth to listen in the King’s stead!”

Overawed by the intrepid demeanor of the Heroic Spirit and his simple salutation, Waver faltered. However, he changed his mind, knowing that it was not the time to pay attention to such things, and mustered the courage in his heart to give directions to this Heroic Spirit he’s never met before.

“I want you to release the bounded field and throw Caster out to the appointed location as soon I give the signal. You can do that, right?”

“It can be done – but it is a race against time. It appears that our army inside the bounded field cannot stop that sea demon for much longer…”

“I know! I’m aware of that!”

As Waver grumbled, he also attended to Saber, who kept dodging the attacks of the black knight, with a heart full of prayers.

“Damn it, Berserker, that bastard… can't something be done about him?!”

“– I will go.”

Lancer, responding resolutely, disappeared after grasping the now solitary crimson spear. The spearman that temporarily turned into spiritual form accurately materialized again on the body of the F15, steadying himself by grabbing the steel wings pulsing with black prana with one hand.

“It all ends here, mad warrior!”

No sooner had Lancer shouted this that he brandished the Gáe Dearg in his right hand above his head and pierced the body of the grotesque machine with the spear tip.

The red spear that can cut through all prana circulation gleamed. It was indeed the archenemy of Berserker’s peculiar ability. But the black knight has had his full share of the power of this attack after the battle in the warehouse district. The mysterious Servant, maddened but not without prudence, did not make the same mistake when faced with Lancer’s Noble Phantasm. Right before the red spear skewered the craft's body, Berserker promptly discarded the doomed F15, and leapt high into the sky after using his arms to wretch off the important part of the craft. Immediately after, the fighter jet, reverted to a mass of scrap metal in an instant by Gáe Dearg cutting off its prana, crashed with Lancer on its wings, throwing up a splendid sheet of water from the Mion river.

The part that Berserker seized at the last minute was naturally the section accommodating the Vulcan unit. The autocannon, having avoided direct contact with Lancer’s spear with a hair's breadth, was still pulsing with the jet-black prana that supplemented it, and did not lose the properties of being the black knight’s Noble Phantasm.

“■□□□□■■■■■■□□□□!!”

Carrying the six barrels and the cylindrical ammunition casing, weighing 200 kilogram in total, Berserker once again aimed from the sky at Saber below him. The rotary cannon, accelerated by prana, spun up in the blink of an eye. Saber finally realized that she had nowhere else to turn in the instant the torrential bullets were about to surge out.

The firing distance for Berserker, having jumped down from the aircraft and continuing to aim at Saber as he descended, was exceptionally closer than before. Saber no longer had time to anticipate for the initial velocity of the rounds, and no matter which way she may dodge, she couldn’t get out of the range of the rain of shells about to pour onto her.

It's all or nothing...!

Now that it has come to this, Saber was prepared to resort to using her Noble Phantasm, misplaced though it may be; the instant she swung the sword over her head, streaks of shining steel came flying in from an impossible angle and struck Berserker head on.

Hammer, axe and bolt gouged the jet-black armor, and a giant sickle cleaved the body of the revolving gun barrel in half. Furthermore, a flaming bolt hit the ammunition storage directly, igniting all the remaining 20mm shells, blossoming wild crimson flames in the air. Berserker, washed over by the fragments and blast, was helplessly blown away, drawing a parabola in the empty air before sinking into the river surface like a thrown rock.

Astounded, Saber turned around and, looking up, saw Archer standing haughtily on the top of the arch of the Fuyuki Bridge. The shooting Noble Phantasms encircled him, surrounding him like a halo. He let out a wicked smile.

“Now, Saber, show it to me. I shall see for myself the true worth of your brilliance as a Heroic Spirit.”

It didn't even need to be said - Saber replied to Archer's insolent words with a silent glance, and once again returned her sight to the river surface, adjusting her stance with the golden sword.

All obstacles have been eliminated. Now was the time of conclusion.

Kiritsugu, who witnessed Berserker’s departure, was on a lifeboat already galloping to the safety zone. He aimed for and shot up a flare at a spot in the empty sky. The roaring yellow phosphorus flame was right above the line connecting Saber’s current position and the speedboat that Kiritsugu abandoned.

“There! Right under it!”

Waver immediately saw the signal and yelled at Rider's herald beside him. The Heroic Spirit Mithrenes disappeared without so much as a nod, returning to the inside of the bounded field where the king and his companions were waiting.

Immediately after, as though it had been in wait, the air around them shook, and the space that was eroded by the thoughts of the Heroic Spirits returned to the shape it was meant to have. Firstly, an alien shadow covered the night sky like a mirage, then its real form emerged in an instant; the giant and ominous body then fell into the water. That place was directly underneath where Kiritsugu shot the flare.

The raging sheets of water thrown up by the gigantic mass impacting the water assaulted the riverbank like a tsunami. However, Saber, the only one who had fought and held her own in direct combat with the sea demon, was not hit by even a single splash. The prana gushing out from her right now summoned a surging wind so pressurized that it brushed aside the wall of water.

At the same time as the reappearance of the sea demon, Rider’s chariot Gordius Wheel also leapt into the dim night sky once again. Its scar-covered form told of the degree of intensity of the battle that played out inside the Reality Marble, but his majestic and awe-inspiring flying form was not diminished at all.

“– Seriously! Just what took all of you so long… Woah!?”

It was during Rider's moment of complaint that he saw the concentration of light pulsing from Saber’s sword; he immediately understood what was happening and urgently turned aside, escaping the area under threat. On the other hand, Caster’s sea demon wouldn’t be able to dodge so dexterously no matter what. The giant throbbing meat lump could do nothing apart from shrieking to scare this unknown brilliance.

The time was ripe.

Pouring all the strength in her body into the two arms grasping the hilt tightly, the King of Knights lifted the golden sword up high.

Light gathered. As if illuminating this holy sword was its ultimate duty, the light condensed further, merging into a blinding brilliance.

At the fierceness and purity of this beam of light, no one could speak a single word.

It was the gallant figure of a knight who once shone the light of purification upon a battle-ravaged world, a darkness blacker than night.

Unyielding for ten years, undefeated in twelve battles. These peerless feats of arms and this glory were eternal, transcending time.

This shining sword itself is the nostalgic, sorrowful, and exalted dream of all warrior's past, present and future who stand at the brink of death on the battlefield – the crystallization of the prayer named 'glory'.

Proudly uplifting this will, ascertaining that this faith will be seen to its end, the king of eternal victory now loudly declared the true name of this miracle she held in her hands.

It was –

"Excalibur!!!"

Light galloped.

Light roared.

The prana, accelerated by the factor of the released dragon, became a streak of light, a swirling and surging torrent that devoured the sea demon together with the dark night.

A silent scream rose within the river water evaporating in an instant, as every single atom composing the body of the giant sea demon that had been the embodiment of terror were exposed to the scorching impact.

But in the center of the sea demon being completely burnt to cinders, within a fortress of bulky defiled flesh, Caster simply wordlessly watched over this moment of white blinding annihilation which had stolen his heart.

"…O, Oh…"

Yes – it was unmistakably a light he had once seen in the distant past.

Had he not once been a knight who pursued and rode after this light?

The recollection, vivid and utterly unclouded, brought Gilles back to the distant past.

It was the light that shone through the stained-glass windows of the great cathedral, at the long-awaited coronation ceremony of King Charles. It was a white brilliance, a blessing of joy that wrapped around Jeanne and Gilles, who had attended as saviors and national heroes, together with the *Ars nova* melody.

Ah, there's no mistake – it was this light.

He could still remember it. Even now, after his fall into brutality, his entire body smeared with corruption, the memories of that day did not fade at all and remained carved into his heart.

Even if his end was stained with humiliation and revulsion, no matter how much he may be held in contempt – the glory in his past alone cannot be denied or overturned, for it was in his heart.

Something that even God or Fate will never be able to take away or violate…

Gilles de Rais was dumbstruck by the clarity of his own rapidly falling tears.

What was he confused with? Had he lost sight of something?

If he could just look back and admit it – wouldn't that be enough?

"Just what, have I…"

Before this murmur, directed at no one, left his mouth, all matter was brought into another world, annihilated by the white light.

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Archer, standing on the high arch of the bridge and looking down upon all, couldn't help but have a smile emerging on his face when he saw this light of destruction that burnt and consumed all.

“Do you see it, King of Conquerors? This is Saber’s light.”

Archer addressed the empty space beside him. Rider, who had just experienced a merciless fight, was letting the chariot pulled by divine bulls remain still in the air and was gazing dazedly at the ultimate light Excalibur was emanating.

“Do you still not want to acknowledge her after witnessing that ray of light?”

Rider snorted, dismissing Archer’s question. However, what was on his face as not despite or mockery, but a solemnity as if he was looking out over a thing of tragic grandeur.

“It was indeed because she took upon her shoulders the hope of every man of the time that she’s able to display such might – it’s painful precisely because it is so blindingly brilliant. Who could have thought that the person carrying such a heavy weight is only a little girl who liked to dream?”

On the river surface, which the two of them looked down upon, Saber’s slender body was huffing painfully due to the intensive battle to the death that had just ended. Rider only knew what kind of heaviness was piled upon her young and delicate shoulders thanks to last night’s quiz. For him, whose personality is open and straightforward, this kind of ‘way of living’ is absolutely unforgivable.

“This kind of little girl is truly the final result of someone who discarded youthful romance and dreams, discarded love, and sunk into the eternal curse of ‘ideals. It is truly painful, and one can’t bear to look upon it anymore.”

“This is exactly what’s lovely about her, isn’t it?”

Different from the King of Conqueror’s fully melancholic expression, the golden Servant’s smile was immeasurably obscene and did not hide his dirty desires at all.

“The overly-mighty ideal that she harbored within her would burn her into nothing but ashes at the end. Those tears that she would shed at her final moment… I imagine it would be very sweet to the taste.”

Complacent, Archer let his imagination run wild. With a flick of his eyes, Rider gave him a look of enmity.

“… It seems I still can’t like you, Babylonian King of Heroes.”

“Oh? You only discerned it now?”

This title made the sparkling golden Heroic Spirit burst fully into a smile.

“What do you plan to do, Rider? Want to use brutal force right now to unleash your anger?”

“Although it’ll be quite a joy to do that, tonight my strength would perhaps not live up to my feelings if my opponent is you.”

After Rider spoke the truth straightforwardly and with no exaggeration, he gave another look at Archer and said scornfully: “Of course, if you don’t want to let the chance pass and insist in fighting with me, this king would gladly do so at any time.”

“No matter. I permit you to escape, King of Conquerors. I wouldn’t feel satisfied if I don’t defeat you at the height of your strength, anyways.”

Hearing this self-possessed declaration from Archer, Rider lifted his eyebrows as if pulling a prank.

“Hmm? Hahaha. Though you say that, the truth must be that your wounds caused by being sunk by Blackie haven’t healed properly either, right?”

“… All who provokes the king need to die to repent their sin!”

Seeing how the other didn’t take the joke well and that his twin red irises were full of a killing intent, Rider tightened the reins of the divine bulls with a smile and increased the distance between them.

“Decide the victor next time, King of Heroes. The owner of the Holy Grail, I imagine, would perhaps be the result of our battle.”

The only ones who are worthy to obtain the Grail are the Heroic Spirits at the level of ‘Kings’. That is, one of the two between the King of Conquerors and the King of Heroes. Undoubtedly, Rider himself still believed firmly in that point right now. The Heroic Spirit Alexander smiled fearlessly and left the top of the arch of the bridge, and as thus galloped towards the riverbank where his Master was at.

“What would happen at the end?... Rider, I still haven’t decided if you’re the only one who’s worthy for me to grant the ultimate treasure to.”

Archer, who was muttering to himself, had another Heroic Spirits in his heart. In terms of the degree of attention he had, the interest of the King of Heroes was actually all piled upon her.

Tonight, witnessing with his own eyes that incomparable light leads the thoughts of the primeval Heroic Spirit back to the distant past.

– Once upon a time, there was a man.

He was a foolish and ridiculous fellow whom, despite having a body made of mud and soil, set his heart to stand shoulder to shoulder with gods.

Of course, his hubris and disrespectful arrogance offended the gods in heaven. The man suffered divine retribution and lost his life.

Even to this day, the King of Heroes still couldn't forget the way that he passed away with tears streaming down his face.

Why are you crying? The King of Heroes had asked.

Could it be that, only now, you are regretting having taken my side?

It's not that – He had answered.

"Who would understand you after I die? Who else would march forward by your side? My friend… when I think that you will live on all alone henceforth, I can't help but shed tears…"

Like so, when he saw that man taking his last breath, the incomparable king realized – the way that this man, who was human but wanted to surpass humanity, had lived, was even more precious and more brilliant than all the treasures he had collected.

"You fool who stretch your hand towards realms not of men… There is only one person in heaven or earth who's worthy of appreciating your destruction, and that is none other than I, Gilgamesh.

Sink into my embrace, oh you glorious and illusionary men. That is my decision."

The golden majestic brilliance disappeared in the night mist, leaving only an evil laughter echoing long after.

Act 11

Act 11

-84:15:32

From the rooftop of the center building of Shinto, which was far away, Sola was observing the figure of the giant sea monster which was swallowed by a blinding white light and gradually disappeared, in the night fog at the other side.

Her vision was already obscured in that fog, moreover from such a distance away, she could not follow up the progress of the fight with her naked eyes. She did not prepare any familiar which could be immediately used for scouting purposes in this situation, so she had no choice but to gaze at the riverbank at which the giant sea monster and fighter jets were dancing wildly, whilst worrying over it.

Anyway, the battle had apparently completed its first stage, but the Command Seals on her right hand was still there. That would mean that Lancer was still remaining in battle in good health.

“Thank God……”

Although she was being hit by strong gusts of wind which raged at the high windswept place, Sola was relieved for now. Lancer would probably bring good news back soon. If his victory was shared with other Servants, Masters apart from Sola would also receive the incentive of additional Command Seals, but that was something trivial. Now, she was happy at merely regaining the three strokes of the Command Seals binding her to her Servant.

If the noise of the blowing wind was absent, Sola would probably sense the presence of an attacker stealing up to her back unnoticed from the stairs earlier. Preoccupied with the battlefield at the other side, she let her guard down. But for the lady who did not even have the knowledge of self-defense, much less combat training, there is no way she could not be blamed.

Suddenly she tripped. Even after she ended up on the concrete floor with her face up, she did not even have the time to grasp what had happened. She reflexively held out her right hand to seek help, but it was grabbed by

someone roughly. Nevertheless, that person obviously did not have the slightest intention of helping Sola, who had fallen. Instead, a blow of excruciating pain struck her wrist.

“Aaa—”

From the surface of her fine and slender wrist, like a broken tap, fresh blood gushed forth… Sola stared attentively in disbelief.

Her right hand was not there.

With a single blow, it was cut off cleanly. The fingers and nails which she prided in and never fail to take care, and also the Command Seals which were more valuable than anything else, disappeared altogether from Sola’s right arm.

Above the pain and the chill of losing her blood, the all the more desperate sense of loss dyed Sola’s thinking pitch black.

“Aa, aaaa, aaaaahhhhhh! AAAAAAHHHH!!”

Whilst letting out a deranged scream, Sola crawled about on the floor, trying to find the whereabouts of her disappeared right hand.

No! It’ll be troublesome if I don’t have THAT. I can’t call Diarmuid. I won’t be cared for by Diarmuid.

Worse come to worst, she would spend all the strokes and command him to “Love me!”, and that should be able to bind him. That’s why she was troubled at her right hand. Whatever the case, even at the price of her life, she would retrieve those Command Seals……

Nevertheless, no matter how much she searched on the cold concrete floor, apart from her splattered blood, there was nothing else — After that, the tips of a pair of boots which were indifferent-looking and not moving, could be seen.

In the midst of her blurring vision due to heavy losses of blood, still prostrate on the floor, Sola looked up and saw an unfamiliar black-haired lady. Not even displaying any emotion, much less pity, that lady expressionlessly looked down at Sola, who was going to faint.

“Hand……My…hand……”

With her remaining left hand, she grabbed the lady’s boots, clinging onto it – after which she lost consciousness.

Without any lingering affection, Hisau Maiya tossed away the female magus' right hand which she severed with all her might using a survival knife. Using proper methods, the engraved Command Seals left on her left wrist could probably be recovered, but because Maiya did not have such technique at this time, it was completely valueless.

Maiya quickly tied the right wrist to prevent further loss of blood, after which she lifted the unconscious target onto her shoulder, and with her other empty hand, rang up Emiya Kiritsugu with her mobile phone.

- *What's wrong, Maiya?"*

"I have secured Sola Nuada-Re Sophia-Ri at Shinto. The Command Seals were cut off with her right hand, but her condition is not critical."

"Okay. Leave that place quickly. Lancer would probably return soon."

"Roger."

After getting the bare minimum conversation over with and cutting off the phone call, Maiya dashed down the stairs quickly and reached the lower floor. In the homunculus rib bone, which was transplanted by means of Irisviel's hands, there was still a dull pain since it had yet to familiarize itself with her body, but as for her movements, there was no problem at all. Thanks to that, just like before she was injured, Maiya trailed Lancer and his new Master, and managed to grab the golden opportunity of capturing Sola during Lancer's absence.

Sure enough, Kiritsugu's conjecture was right, but as before, he still viewed Kayneth who had lost his rights as Master, as the target he should annihilate. Kiritsugu's policy is to be cautious against the ones who were chosen as Masters, even if they were to lose their Command Seals.

His real intention for ordering Maiya to capture Sola alive should be to question her about Kayneth's hiding place. The interrogation would certainly be a cruel experience for Sola, but even if it were the case, there would be no sympathy or mercy from Maiya.

In the situation of men fighting against men, cruelty was not something uncommon. Even Maiya herself understood that simple fact as it is, much less Kiritsugu.

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The tranquility of late night accompanying the night streets of Shinto seemed so far away, as ambulance and patrol cars traveled to and fro continually. To those people who rushed about whilst flashing their emergency lights, they would probably not understand what situation had forced them to rush about in the dead of the night, nor the entire picture of the situation. Perhaps they would not understand it even during tomorrow or henceforth.

The shadow of a tall man in the clothing of a priest walking alone on the footpath late at night, would sufficiently be a target of questioning as a suspicious person under normal circumstances, but tonight they were virtually worked to death due to receipt of successive requests for help and instructions for blockades, so there is no way they have the time to even be concerned about an ordinary pedestrian. Amongst the patrol cars which passed Kotomine Kirei countless times, not even one paid any attention to him.

For Kirei who was silently hurrying back to Fuyuki Church, caught in a deep thought within his mind, he did not spare any thoughts at all for the chaos of the city from which the remains of the mayhem had yet to subside.

Always faithful to the instructions, obedient to the responsibilities, strict with his ethics. Kirei had strived that hard until today. His conducts were always above the need to be doubted.

Which is exactly why – this was the first time he had the perplexity of not being able to surmise the meaning behind his actions.

Originally, Kirei would rush to Tōsaka Tokiomi’s fights with the intention of providing backup for his teacher – but the moment he saw that Tokiomi’s opponent was Matō Kariya, Kirei chose not to join him as reinforcements, but merely to hide in the shades; an action tantamount to sabotage.

It was certainly true that he knew the difference in strength between Tokiomi and Kariya, and that the situation rendered things like assistance meaningless in the first place. So even if he was to only stand beside the fight as a spectator, one could say that his decision was in line with his principles.

Nevertheless, his actions after that, were a complete deviation from his duty,

The instant Tokiomi caused Kariya to fall from the rooftop of the apartment, as if recognizing it as a complete victory, he did not even check his enemy's corpse. Though half-shocked by his teacher's audacity, Kirei went to look for Kariya's body as a follow-up…… When he saw that figure prostrate on the back alley not long after, Kariya was still breathing.

Naturally, if he was the hound of the Tōsaka camp, delivering the final blow swiftly was an obvious duty. In spite of that, the thing going to and from Kirei's mind then, was the contents of the conversation he had with Archer this morning.

If Kotomine Kirei wants to understand himself, not just Emiya Kiritsugu – no, prioritizing over Kiritsugu, he should observe Matō Kariya's fate – that was the advice given to him.

Generally, that was an unpleasant conversation. A joke not deserving his time to be listened to.

But still, with Tokiomi and Kariya's showdown before him, what on earth had caused Kirei to choose the action of standing beside as a spectator? There was no need for him to stay there if he had decided that assistance was unnecessary. Wasn't it more meaningful for him to seek the other Masters?

And then, the instant the flames Tokiomi created caught Kariya…… The thing, which was on his mind, wasn't it the feeling of dejection?

When he suddenly noticed what he was doing, Kirei had already begun administering first-aid curative magecraft onto Kariya's body. Carrying Kariya, whose condition had become stable despite in a deep sleep due to his actions, he left the battlefield, and left him in front of the Matō residence whilst stealthily concealing himself from public gaze – That happened about 15 minutes ago.

The carvings of the Command Seals were still on Kariya's hand. Kirei did not watch the battle at the Mion River until the end, but no matter how much injury was inflicted, Berserker was apparently still alive.

Whilst covering the long distance from Miyama Town to the outskirts of Shinto at a slow pace, during that journey which passed through Fuyuki City, Kirei was still distressed over the self-question from which no answer came out – Why the heck had he done such a thing?

This was completely different from his buying and storing up wines of which the taste he knew not. That was not an action completely deprived of benefits. Until now, Kirei had also done secret things without Tokiomi's

permission, and also giving false reports repeatedly at times, but those were not something which could directly obstruct Tokiomi. His hope of a confrontation with Emiya Kiritsugu and Tokiomi’s possession of the Holy Grail – those were not conflicting things.

Notwithstanding that, his prolonging the life of Matō Kariya who had been prowling after Tokiomi as a nemesis, had unmistakably turned him into Tokiomi’s foe. An act of treason with no excuses allowed. In the state of not even having a definite purpose, he had perpetrated something preposterous. Tonight, Kirei had clearly crossed the line of being a loyal servant of Tokiomi.

Although he was conscious of the gravity of his action, why did Kirei not have a tinge of regret within his heart, but instead inexplicable exhilaration?

Archer – had he been tricked by that King of Heroes heroic spirit?

Compared to his walking feet, his mind was extremely worn out.

Suddenly, Kirei had a rare notion of wanting to talk to his father Risei. While he is honest to Kirei in all aspects, he is a father who would never be able to understand Kirei’s worries. Nevertheless, come to think of it, didn’t Kirei not have a heart to heart talk with his father before?

Even if he would end up making his father deeply disappointed, if he would just speak out his mind without any fear – while his relationship with his father would definitely change, won’t that provide something completely new to Kirei?

With this vague anticipation in his heart, shelving his worry for the time being, Kirei continued walking into the night.

-82:09:51

To Father Risei, supervisor of the fourth Heaven's Feel, this was truly an extremely tiring night.

This was the second time he had assumed the office of supervisor of the Heaven's Feel, but he had never dreamed that a situation so difficult to deal with would arise.

Precisely because of the large scale of the series of problems that had arisen, in order to eliminate evidence, not only the Holy Church, but even the Magi's Association was also acting in secret. To both sides of these two large groups, the situation had already developed to a point that - rather than quarrelling amongst themselves and defining their respective spheres of influence, they had to prioritize on considering how to pick up the pieces.

On the surface, the strange incident not far from the Mion River was attributed to poisonous gases produced by chemical reactions caused by industrial waste--this report could temporarily deceive the public. The patrolling media truck was also constantly broadcasting that inhaling the toxic fumes could cause hallucinations, and that people living along the shores should hasten to the hospital for treatment. Of course, all the hospitals that could conduct diagnostics at night had already been infiltrated by magi and Executors skilled in brainwashing through the power of suggestion; they were currently anxiously awaiting orders. It should be possible to thus eliminate the majority of witness statements, but not the source of rumors.

The procedure for purchasing two F15 fighter machines from Middle Eastern weapon merchants had just been completed; this was the result of the Clock Tower playing the middleman. Though it was a second-hand C-model plane, at this critical point there really was absolutely no time to take this into account. The two F15s, on which the flag of Japan had been temporarily painted, would be delivered to the fortified air base; all that's left is to take the opportunity to exchange incompatible parts, and then assemble the J-model fighter plane.

The Japanese self-defense force was certainly a group restless with budget. A single fighter plane already cost over a billion yen, and now that a scandal involving losing two fighters simultaneously had occurred, this truth needed to be annihilated no matter what. From this point on, they could only use pre-prepared replacement fighters used as bait for negotiations and get the self-defense forces to take the responsibility of destroying evidence as well.

It was already late at night when the endless telephone negotiations finally stopped and he could rest for a while, but Risei immediately remembered the guest waiting in the main hall. Sighing, he pulled over a chair and began his work anew, continuing to carry out his duties as supervisor.

"I am truly sorry to have made you wait. I have been rather busy tonight."

In Risei's voice there was an exhaustion that could not be hidden.

From the dimly lit pews came the sound of somewhat artificial laughter.

"That's unavoidable. You have urgent matters to attend to."

A light, metallic squeaking sound of the wheelchair's wheels rolling along accompanied that laughter. The silhouette that emerged from the darkness remained seated.

The silhouette, so wan almost as if he was a completely different person and could not even stand to walk, was actually the once-famous prodigy Kayneth El-Melloi.

Who among those knowing his past circumstances would have thought that he would have been reduced to such a condition? But in his eyes was a strong willpower that could be called obsession from which the stubborn, intolerant personality of the former prodigy magus could be vaguely perceived.

Although Kayneth had sustained great physical injuries that made it almost impossible to re-establish his glory, he had more or less retained the use of his hands through the contacts of the El-Melloi clan, exchanging an astonishing sum of money in gratitude to make a deal with a doll-maker residing in Japan, and through great difficulty had obtained the ability to move freely within the parameters of the wheelchair's mobility. His left little finger, covered in a thick layer of plaster, had also regained its sense of pain.

"Father, regarding my application— what exactly is the judgment?"

In contrast to the solicitous smile on his face, Kayneth's voice contained at least half an undertone of threat. Those drug addicts were probably like this when the effects had worn off and they were demanding drugs from others before they went into withdrawal. Risei gazed steadily at the face of this former magecraft prodigy; his face showed paranoia and confusion that could not be concealed.

That things would reach this point was definitely not what Risei had hoped for. However, a contract was ultimately a contract. Setting aside the consideration of the secret alliance with Tōsaka for the moment, it was necessary to practice what he preached for the honor of the Church.

"… Indeed, in the crusade against Caster, Servant-Lancer played an important role; this has also been verified in the report of the supervisor."

"That is to say, there is no doubt that I am eligible to receive a Command Seal?"

"Though it is like that…"

Father Risei furrowed his brow and glanced at Kayneth as if feeling something is inconceivable.

"Of course, in accordance to the agreement it is necessary to give the Master of Lancer a fitting reward… Mr. Kayneth, do you think I can regard you as a Master??"

A look of hatred momentarily appeared in Kayneth's eyes, but he immediately recovered his demeanor that's cautious enough to be called gentlemanly.

"Regarding the contract with Lancer, I established it in the form that it would be jointly borne by me and my fiancée Sola. I certainly do not have the intention of proclaiming myself a Master. The two of us, Sola and I, are one Master."

"But now, are not both the supply of prana and the management of the Command Seals the undertaking of Miss Sola alone?"

Kayneth's grimacing expression was truly difficult to explain away as a gracious smile.

"Because of consideration for strategy, the Command Seals have now been temporarily passed to Sola for safekeeping. But the control over the contract with Lancer is still mine. If you are suspicious, you may ask Lancer directly for confirmation. And most importantly, the signature on the application submitted to the Church is mine alone."

Father Risei sighed. Even if he were to dig deep into the matter, make objections on the grounds of small and unimportant points, it would be meaningless. The true source of Risei’s headache was this unexpected situation of having to pass out Command Seals to a Master other than Tokiomi Tosaka. At this time, even if he were unwilling to add the Command Seal to Kayneth, at the end it would not be possible not to pass the Command Seals that he's reluctant to part with to his fiancée. Even if Father Risei were to interfere in the internal conflict of the Archibald faction, it would be of no benefit to him.

"——All right. I acknowledge your status as a Master. Come, sir Kayneth, please hold out your hand."

With practiced skill Risei traced the faded marks on Kayneth's outstretched right hand, transferring one of the Command Seals accumulated on his right wrist to Kayneth's hand. There was not even any pain; the entire process was concluded in only a few minutes.

"Then please continue to fight glorious battles as a Master——"

"That is most certain."

Kayneth nodded, all smiles, then took out a handgun that had been hidden in the seat of his wheelchair and aimed at the priest who had already turned away.

The dry sound of a gun firing broke the silence of the Hall of God.

Kayneth did not even spare another glance for the old priest who had slumped down and stared transfixed at the picture of the Command Seal carved on the back of his right hand.

Things had progressed to this point, but he had only one… compared to the opponents who had not used their Command Seals, he was already in a disadvantaged position. And the Masters of Saber and Rider had already obtained new Command Seals; these circumstances definitely could not be ignored.

The assassination of the supervisor would undoubtedly cause a stir, but in this Heaven's Feel, there were magi other than himself who liked to use small props such as handguns. The primary suspect would thus be the filthy rat employed by the Einzberns.

Kayneth could not suppress the satisfied laugh that flooded forth from deep in his throat. He was immersed in the ecstasy of regaining his status as a Master. For the assassination of the supervisor, an action that made the dignity and pride of Lord El-Melloi plummet down to the floor, he had no intention of self-reproach.

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Immediately upon stepping into the chapel, Kirei felt the presence of death.

A faint stench of blood, and the remaining, even fainter odor of smoke. Certainly, there had been someone who had committed an unforgivably wicked deed in this house of God.

Though he did not sense any danger, Kirei still walked in very carefully, passing through the pews - upon arriving at the altar, he discovered the silhouette lying at the side.

"Father—"

The cry that rose from his lips was weak. At the same time as discovering the silhouette of Father Risei, the trained and keenly observant eyes of an Executor noticed the bullet hole in his back and the pool of blood on the ground.

Kirei, in a state of complete mental torpor, carefully examined the corpse of his father.

He pulled up the right sleeve, checking the number of the Command Seals his father had managed. As expected, there was one less. Risei had given one of the Command Seals under his management to someone and had presumably been murdered by this person soon after. One of the master's that had won merit in the process of the crusade against Caster had been dissatisfied with sharing the credit with the others he had fought alongside and had therefore committed such a crime. There was essentially no need for analysis to be able to determine the entire sequence of events.

But even a magus could not seize all the Command Seals from the hands of the dead elderly priest. The Command Seals managed by the supervisor were protected by holy prayers. Without his permission, it is not possible to seize them through the use of thaumaturgy. Father Risei, the only one who knew the secret holy words, was already dead; the Command Seals of previous Grail Wars preserved to this day could no longer be used.

——That wasn't right; would Father Risei have permitted such a thing to happen?

Kirei lifted his father's right hand, discovering that there were unnatural bloodstains on the fingertips. They seemed to be marks made with abrasions. The dying Father Risei had immersed his finger in the pool of blood and must have left clues somewhere.

Since he had understood this, it was relatively easy to find the words in blood.

On the floor, the final will in red-black writing was "jn424"-- one not of Christian faith might think this to be a secret message of unknown meaning. But to Kirei, who had inherited Risei's pious faith, the significance of this cipher was very obvious.

John 4:24. Without missing a word, Kirei recited those holy words stored in his memory.

"God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth——"

As if in response, on the already cold right wrist of Father Risei, all the Command Seals simultaneously gave off a faint light.

Accompanying a burst of dull pain, the Command Seals were transferred one by one onto Kirei's arm. Speechless, Kirei stared at the light of the Command Seals.

Undoubtedly, that was the faith a father had entrusted to his son.

Father Risei had believed that the first person to discover his corpse would definitely be his son. Only so did he write down in blood a code that only one of the clergy could understand. He had entrusted all the important duties of the supervisor—managing the Command Seals, guarding the Grail, guiding the Heaven's Feel in the right direction—to his son. He had truly believed that his son was one who could bear these responsibilities; even in death, he had no doubt of this.

He did not know that Kirei had concealed his newly-obtained Command Seals, and had already gained the right to be a Master——

He did not know that his son had, on an impulse, sown the seeds of disaster for his benefactor Tokiomi——

"——!"

Suddenly feeling the tears falling from his cheeks, Kirei pressed his hands to his face, stunned.

To shed tears in front of his father's corpse and last wishes… … as a person, this was natural.

Even thus, at that time Kirei had been mired in terror and confusion, as if almost falling into the abyss of hell.

He must face all this directly——in his heart there was an authoritative voice telling him thus.

The feelings flooding up from your heart now, Kotomine Kirei—you must understand all of this, must accept all of this. That is because——

Tears.

When was the last time he had shed tears? Now he still clearly remembered that it had been three years ago. Using a hand to scoop up the falling tears, that woman had once said this: "You love me." ——

The intrinsic ability in his heart to conceal oneself was staunchly blocking recollection.

He cannot turn back. He cannot reflect. The tears shed that day, the feelings held that time, needed to be tossed into the abyss of forgetting.

The answer he had once understood.

The truth he had painstakingly come to realize.

If it was because he had not faced this with an open heart and had thus adopted the method of avoidance that allowed him to maintain his current condition --

He could not comprehend the tears that flowed once more at all. The same feelings as at that time were crying out to the sentiments that had been sealed away and sought for understanding.

But heedless of these rational warnings, memories seeped continuously forth from the gaps between the seals.

This time was very far from the ending he had expected -- he had thought thus then.

At the bedside of the frail, dying woman, had Kirei not come to realize the thing which his consciousness desired?

Wanting to ■ ■ ■ ■ this woman——

Wanting to see this woman even more ■ ■ ■ ■ ——

In deeply loving Kotomine Kirei and trusting him——in this aspect, his father, and this woman, did have something in common.

They are also the same in absolutely misunderstanding the nature of the person that is Kirei.

Precisely because of this, three years ago Kirei had constantly prayed like this in his heart…

In the moments before his father’s death, let him sample once again the joy of the greatest ■ ■ ■ ■ of the mortal world—

"Just like those beasts who chase the scent of blood—— The soul pursues pleasure——"

As if the ruby-like eyes that had been latent in the bottom of his heart, accompanied by that sinister laugh, were quietly whispering.

Only pleasure is the form of the soul-did he not speak thus? The nature of Kotomine Kirei is also like this——

"…O Lord… hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The familiar prayer he had to recite every day instantly spewed forth from his mouth; this might have been an instinct of self-preservation. In this way he returned to his role as a clergyman, tightly binding a soul that was close to falling to pieces.

“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us… and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil… Amen.”

He sealed the cursed truth of the tears falling uninterrupted from his face to forgetfulness's other shore. Kirei prayed for his father's fortunes in the next life and made the sign of the cross on his chest.

-72:43:28

"You—useless fellow! Trash that only knows how to boast!"

Lancer could only quietly lower his head and silently endure the ferocious scolding.

"You were only to protect a woman temporarily. But you could not even do it; this is preposterous! So, this is the stuff a so-called knight is made of!"

Kayneth was currently cursing, spit flying everywhere. But from the extent of disconcertment, compared to Lancer who forgot himself out of shame, Kayneth was actually even more out of things. Because of his naturally stubborn personality, now the extent of Lord El-Melloi’s anger was filled with righteous indignation to the point of being fear-inducing.

Kayneth had obtained a new Command Seal; satisfied, he had returned to the abandoned factory that he used as a hiding place and found that there was in fact no sign of Sola there. Logically speaking, at this time she should already have ended the battle with Caster and returned here. He had waited

in a state of anxiety brought on by worry, and waited until—the solitary return of Lancer, whose expression was serious.

"Though it was only a temporary substitution, Sola was undoubtedly your Master, was she not! You actually do not have the ability to guard her till the end—why did you become a Servant? How can you be so shameless as to return alone!"

"...I truly do not have the dignity to return."

"Then you—in the battle with Caster, was it also your foolish childishness that encouraged you to neglect the protection of your Master, focusing only on displaying that foolish heroism of yours?!"

Lancer weakly shook his head. His natural beauty was twisted by sorrow; this meant that he was also remorseful of this hateful outcome. But now Kayneth did not have the time to notice this at all.

"Master, please allow me… Because Sola-Sama and I did not make an official contract, we cannot even feel each other's presence..."

"It is precisely because of this that you should have been even more careful, even more attentive!"

Kayneth immediately shouted, cutting off his Servant's explanation.

Usually for a Master and Servant who had made a contract, no matter which party had fallen into danger, it would be communicated to the other. In truth, in the Einzbern forest, it was in this way that Lancer had saved Kayneth from the emergency circumstances.

But this time, because Lancer and Sola had in fact entered the battle without forming an official contract according to the laws of contract thaumaturgy, Lancer had only protected Sola out of his duty to Kayneth; this had also become a cause of the disaster.

In the end, by the time Lancer had ended the battle and returned to the rooftop of the building in central Fuyuki, Sola, who had originally stayed there, had long disappeared; only the bloodstains splattered over the floor were any hint as to the seriousness of the occurrence.

The only thing that could be confirmed was that Sola was still alive. The prana supply that allowed Lancer to remain in this world and that provided him with the strength to act was still flowing unobstructed into his body. Undoubtedly, she had been kidnapped, but the instigator did not seem to intend to take her life.

If it had been another Servant, perhaps it would be possible to sense her approximate location by the path of the prana supply. But unfortunately, because the contract which Lancer had made was not a standard one—the contractor and supplier of prana were two different people, his ability to sense the supplier of prana was clearly extremely weak. Even if he could determine that Sola was still alive, but where the prana came from, he could not sense at all. With no leads, searching for Sola in the city was almost like searching for a needle in the haystack. In the end, he had had to return alone.

"Ahah, Sola... indeed I should not have passed the Command Seals to her... a magecraft battle would truly have overloaded her..."

"In not advising Sola-Sama otherwise, I am also responsible. But Sola-Sama made that decision purely because she wished that you, Sir Kayneth, could regain your standing. In that case, no matter what, please—"

Kayneth raised his eyes, clouded with jealousy, and stared at Lancer.

"You still have the gall to speak thus. Don’t act stupid, Lancer, it must have been you who encouraged Sola."

"You... why would you draw such a conclusion..."

"Hmph, stop pretending! In the stories of legend, you are fairly well known for womanizing and adultery. Were you not involuntarily intending to seduce your master’s fiancée?"

Kneeling on the floor with his head lowered, Lancer’s shoulders were shaking violently, almost dangerously.

"——My master, no matter what you must take back those words."

"hit a nerve? You cannot endure this anger? In that case, you are intending to show me your true face of ferocity?"

Kayneth continued to mock the Heroic Spirit who could barely control his own emotions.

"You’ve finally slipped up. On one hand you swear eternal loyalty to me, speaking pretty words; on the other hand, driven by lust, you betray me. You always spoke of knighthood with a proud expression; do you think that would be enough to mislead me—Kayneth?"

"Sir Kayneth... you... why do you not understand my loyalty?!"

Lancer’s sobbed. The somewhat quivering inquiry was almost plaintive.

"All I wanted was to defend the honor I have always had! I only want to participate with you in glorious battles! Master, why do you not understand the heart of a knight?!"

"Stop saying these insolent things, Servant!"

Kayneth mercilessly snapped at Lancer’s plea with a ruthless expression. The suspicion of and dissatisfaction with his Servant had at this point already passed boiling point in his heart.

"Presumptuous puppet. No matter what you are only a Servant. You are only a shadow that can stay in the real world through magical means! The glory and pride you speak of is only a trick that the spirits of the dead use to confuse the people of the world. Furthermore, you are actually insolent enough to the point of lecturing your Master; know the limits to your audacity!"

"——"

Because what Kayneth had said was too much, Lancer was speechless. Kayneth, seeing Lancer’s expression, secretly felt a sadistic pleasure. Seizing the opportunity, he stretched his right arm, on which the image of the Command Seals had once again been carved, towards Lancer; the magus proudly laughed loudly.

"If you are dissatisfied, then try using that pride and honor of which you speak to withstand my Command Seals—hm, no match? This then is your true ability. The spirit and fortitude of which you speak are not even worth mentioning in the presence of the Command Seals. Those are the real tricks of puppets such as Servants, then.”

"… Kayneth… sir…"

Facing Kayneth who was loudly mocking him, Lancer weakly lowered his head, unable to make any sort of rebuttal. The previous majesty of brandishing the twin lances in the presence of warlords had long since vanished without a trace; whether from weakly slumped shoulders, or the unfocused eyes staring at the ground, it was impossible to see any trace of heroism.

Looking at his miserable likeness, Kayneth finally felt that he had vented all the grievances he had been continuously accumulating and felt slightly relieved.

Perhaps up till now, Kayneth had finally been able to establish his ideal master-servant relationship with this Heroic Spirit. Though it was somewhat late; he should have been able to, at an earlier time—preferably immediately after summoning—completely strike down his pride. If this had been done earlier, this presumptuous Servant would probably not have had other intentions and served him compliantly.

"——Master."

After a long silence, Lancer suddenly called to Kayneth in a cold voice.

"What is it? Is there anything you still have to say?"

"...That is not my intention. There appears to be something closing in on us. It is probably the sound of an engine equipped with an automatic drive."

Though Kayneth did not hear anything. But the hearing of ordinary people was greatly incomparable to that of a Servant.

A motorcar which, at almost daybreak, drove in this direction with this abandoned factory as its target, definitely could not be simply passing by.

Come to think of it, at the time of deciding this place as a stronghold, the camouflage enchantments he had set up in the surroundings had almost reached the point of revealing weak points... Kayneth sneered at himself who was no longer a magus, and surfaced a dry smile.

"Lancer, go immediately to destroy it. Do not stay your hand."

"Understood."

Lancer nodded, immediately shifted into spirit form, and disappeared.

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According to the directions that Irisviel, who was sitting in the front passenger seat, was giving, the Mercedes-Benz 300SL that Saber was driving had gradually left Shinto, moved east, and come to a deserted area.

"If you follow this road straight, on the left-hand side there is an abandoned factory. There... appears to be the stronghold of Lancer and the rest."

The location of the factory and the route to take had all been told to Irisviel over the phone by Kiritsugu.

After the intense battle not far from the river, one could guess that Lancer, who had left the battlefield without a word, would probably have returned to his master’s side. Upon hearing that Kiritsugu had gotten hold of a report as to Lancer’s whereabouts, Saber proposed to act immediately.

"Come to think of it... are you all right? Wouldn’t consecutive battles be a great burden to you?"

"No problem, Irisviel. On the other hand, I hope to be able to face off against Lancer tonight."

After somberly announcing this, this time it was Saber who flanked worriedly at the passenger seat.

"You, on the other hand, Irisviel, are you all right? You did not look too well just now."

While operating the steering wheel, Saber looked at Irisviel beside her. Saber discovered at a glance that Irisviel’s face was pale and bloodless, and that she was constantly wiping cold sweat from her forehead. Ever since leaving the riverside, she had been like this. Though she was trying her best to hide it, observers could tell at a glance that she was exerting herself.

"... Don’t worry, Saber. As long as you are by my side...

Ah, look. That building. That should be it."

A long time ago, when the city had not yet been depicted as an emerging residential area, this was probably a place used for something like lumber. The location that had been abandoned by developing trends, forgotten by emergent flourishing streets, quietly stood in the heart of a small hilly area overgrown with lallang.

Slowly passing through the front door and into empty ground, Saber turned off the car’s engine. The surroundings were quiet; Irisviel, standing outside the car, warily eyed the situation around, then nodded.

"—Indeed, there are traces of magecraft enchantments. But what is strange is that they do not seem to be carefully managed; they are already showing flaws."

"No, it is this place. Irisviel."

Saber, who had gotten out of the car a little later, asserted with a calm expression. This highly skilled swordswoman had probably long sensed through sharp senses the scent of battle.

Indeed—as if to prove Saber's pronouncement true, in front of the silent abandoned land suddenly appeared a handsome figure holding a lance.

"You were actually able to find this place—it must not have been easy, Saber."

"After investigating, my—partner told me this was your stronghold."

The word 'Master' had almost issued forth from her lips, but she ultimately had not said it in the end—this showed the minute wave of emotion of which even Saber herself had not been aware. Of course, in principle it was for the sake of concealing the reality of who her true Master really was. But, the most fundamental reason was still that subconsciously, she did not wish to admit that Kiritsugu was her master.

Lancer's expression was grave, very different from usual, hesitating for a long time as if choosing words in his mind, then asking the visitor a question.

"Where is my master's fiancée? ... Saber, you will not say that you do not know?"

Saber's and Irisviel's expressions both turned troubled; they looked at each other.

"I do not know—what happened?"

"Nothing. Pretend I never asked."

Lancer sighed lengthily; the amount of relief it contained was far greater than disappointment. Originally, he had not intended to ask Saber this question. That the one who was his rival would use such underhanded means as kidnapping a hostage—just thinking about it, Lancer found it detestable.

"—Come to think of it, Saber, are you all right? I do not think it was to chat with me that you came here. But didn't you expend a lot of energy in the battle against Caster?"

"Regarding this, I think the other Servants are the same."

Saber passed over the matter as if it were inconsequential. It was indeed as she had said; in the battle with Caster at the riverside, every Servant had expended a great deal of prana.

"So, I predicted that tonight no one would initiate an attack, instead taking the defensive stance—precisely because of this, there is no need to worry that tonight's battle will be intruded upon by people who have nothing to do with it."

Saber, whose entire body was overflowing with a calm fighting spirit, stepped forward. Her slender, small body nevertheless evoked the impression of majesty; this aura, accompanied by the splendidly radiant armor formed of dazzling prana, enveloped her entire body.

"It is already almost dawn... There is still some time in the night; if this great opportunity were to be missed, we do not know in which month of which year we will have another opportunity to face off without a care. I do not think this opportunity should be missed—what do you think? Lancer."

Lancer, whose usually handsome expression had been lost to the worries of his heart, now finally smiled slightly.

"Saber... now the only thing that can bring a cool and refreshing wind to my heart, is this pure will of yours to fight."

In reality, a while ago Saber had also been secretly surprised as to why Lancer had lost his previous majesty. Until she had seen his smile and discovered that her worries were unnecessary. A man with such a smile clearly did not require concern or worry of any kind. That sort of smile was one that only people who had overcome all difficulties and were steadfast in their beliefs could have.

Lancer brandished the red lance as if wishing to chase away all the worries and laments in his heart; the point was directed at Saber.

Saber also released the Barrier of the Wind King; the precious golden sword was revealed amidst the whirlwind. Facing Diarmuid's Gáe Dearg, using air pressure to conceal the blade of the sword was meaningless.

And the most important thing was, the King of Knights believed that this rival originally from another time but that she had coincidentally met in this world was a Heroic Spirit worthy to accept the light of the sword in which she had accumulated all her glory that shone upon him.

The morning light was lucent, the sky a faint red; all the fighting spirits concentrated between the two Servants was silently and anxiously on the

offensive. If one’s senses were especially sensitive, just standing in the middle of the whirlpool of their wills would make one feel pain as if having been hit; perhaps it would even induce a heart attack.

Every cell in Irisviel’s body shuddered with the anticipation of a lethal blow; to say nothing of the aura, even the circulation of her blood was stagnated.

Then—both parties stepped forward at the same time with spirits majestic as the rainbow in the sky, and the clashing sounds were clear as ripping cloth.

The two heroes who had not had a chance to battle these three days, tonight finally had the chance to face off; an intense battle would once again occur.

The situation of battle tonight—on one hand was a re-enactment of the showdown at the warehouses, but the battle of their crossing swords was even more intense than the first—fiercer, more direct, more final; it was a direct clash of strength on strength.

Between the two there was no need for mutual evaluation, nor the use of tricks to confuse the other. Lancer held only one lance right from the beginning; the blade of Saber’s sword was also completely revealed. Neither used means of plots and tricks. Even faster, even more imposing. After one made a move, the other would immediately retaliate at full strength with a blow that would counter the first. A simple contest of skill, blade of sword against point of lance, even more intense, even more white-hot.

The holy sword intertwined with the demonic lance, in direct opposition; the sparks flying were simply dazzling. The clash between the precious artifacts of legend, driven by strength and speed far beyond that of a human, passed the speed of sound, nearing the speed of light. Observation had long since lost meaning in this momentous battle. Those divine skills, pushed to the limits at the point of this fierce battle, were having a supreme contest between the two.

An unknown number of rounds had been fought; perhaps tens of rounds, perhaps hundreds of rounds. It was simply impossible to determine with a mortal eye. After the lance and sword of the two clashed, they finally separated, and moved away from each other.

"Saber, you—"

Lancer had just started speaking, but was unable to continue, his face an expression of anguish and confusion.

Tonight, though Saber’s swordplay had changed only slightly, but it was indeed lighter in strength than the first time and somewhat held back. Lancer would not have been unable to notice this. This was not due to the expenditure of Saber’s physical strength, but it was that her swordplay itself had changed.

Saber held tightly onto her left thumb, tucked into her palm, in actuality not grasping her sword. The remaining four fingers were lightly wrapped around the sword; in controlling her sword, her left hand was used only for support. When attacking, the strength of her left hand was not used at all.

It had clearly been Saber who had taken the initiative to pronounce her intention of facing off, but she deliberately did not use her left hand, only using the right to hold the sword of gold.

Of course, Lancer understood the reason behind this.

Indeed, Lancer had once used the demonic lance Gáe Buidhe to seal the strength of Saber’s left hand, but in the battle against Caster last night, Lancer had destroyed the cursed yellow lance, proactively giving up the advantageous lead. But Saber’s pride would not settle for accepting Lancer’s concession, and so she intentionally did not use her left hand. This, then, was an action of true chivalry.

But—even that concession that was noble enough to inspire instantaneous respect—Lancer did not welcome this action from his heart.

If the action of casting away Gáe Buidhe had caused Saber unnecessary concern.

From the final result, it meant that Lancer’s actions had dampened the enthusiasm of the showdown between the two. It was a battle in which both parties did not have any regrets, and used all their strength to face off, that Lancer had hoped for. If Saber had held back because she could not put aside her consideration of the fairness of circumstance, Lancer was truly somewhat uneasy about the battle.

"—If you misunderstand, I will be very troubled. Lancer."

As if having guessed what Lancer was thinking, Saber shook her head with a stern but calm expression.

"If I were to use my left hand, my shame would definitely slow my sword. Facing your superb skills with the lance, this would be a fatal mistake."

"Saber..."

"So, Diarmuid, this is really the best strategy I use in order to put all my strength into bringing you down."

Saber said resolutely, Holding the sword with one hand was indeed somewhat heavy; Saber lowered the sword slightly, and assumed her stance.

Shining in her eyes was only an awe-inspiring, coolly clear will to fight. There was no carelessness, nor was there hesitation.

Perhaps to her, the extent of the injury to her left hand was only of secondary importance in battle. Perhaps the most important contributor to Saber's ability to obtain victory was in the clear fighting spirit and passion for battle that had been honed to purity.

To sever her confusion, she would rather give up her left hand—the pride hidden in her heart, then, was her greatest weapon.

It is this in which the King of Knights is most noble.

Saber now undoubtedly had embraced the resolution of fighting to the death. She also wished to face off with Lancer to her heart's content under conditions like these—after understanding her intentions, Lancer felt something intense and also freeing, as if having been shocked by electricity.

"Glory shines from within the sword of the King of Knights. It is truly great that I have been able to meet you."

The path that the two anticipated was the same.

If it was a narrow bridge on which it was not possible to give way to each other, the person who took a step first must be respectfully seen off from behind by the other who had fallen back.

Precisely thus—was this without worry, without distraction, in which lives were risked, the exploration and pursuit of lance and sword, a battle of true worth.

The expressions of the two were both extremely anxious and serious, but at the corner of their lips hung the hint of a smile.

"Head knight of the Knights of Fianna, Diarmuid ua Duibhne—attacks!"

"That is well. King of Britain, Artoria Pendragon meets battle——!"

The two closed in once again, white blades clashing, sparks flying; from its midst could be seen the joy of those to whom battle is the meaning for their living, shining brightly.

-72:37:17

Kayneth hid in the shadows deep inside the abandoned factory and gazed at the situation of the battle outside. The thoughts in his heart, contrary to the incorrupt preparedness of those knights, were only boiling with anxiety.

Since the victor remained long undecided, he was getting more fidgety by the second with those anxious feelings.

Why couldn’t he win?

Although Saber underestimated Lancer so much, why would Lancer’s spear still be unable to hit Saber?

The answer became very clear upon some careful thinking – that is, Lancer is very weak, far more inferior to Saber.

At this moment, he regretted profoundly for not getting the Heroic Spirit Alexander.

It would never have turned out like this had he made the King of Conquerors his Servant as he had previously planned. Having his Holy Relic stolen at the crucial moment, he had to summon Diarmuid as a substitute in a hurry. As long as a first-rate, authentic Master such as himself is present, those small disadvantages can be amended even if the ranks of the Heroic Spirit were lowered. The parts that the Servant lacks in will be amended by his own talent; Lord El-Melloi did indeed have such a fearless attitude.

However, right now, having lost his Magic Circuits, Kayneth had long lost his previous confidence. In order to survive this war with his sole remaining Command Seal and an inferior Servant, he had to be even more prudent than before.

When there is no definite chance of victory, the right thing to do would be to immediately escape with the Master. Although he hadn’t gotten around asking how Lancer managed to lose Gáe Buidhe, the chances of victory against Saber became even more elusive after her left hand had healed.

Right now, wasn't the time to stick to battles; Lancer should have other duties needing to be prioritized over this. It would be impossible for the current Kayneth to search and rescue Sola by himself. It simply cannot be done without ordering his Servant.

But – just how stupid is that Lancer? Can't he even realize the severity of such a situation?

Fretting, Kayneth scratched his head repetitively. How great would it be if he could use a Command Seal right now! Why did he just have to have only one Command Seal by his hand? It was such a pity for Sola to take away two Command Seals. If only she was able to trust Kayneth…

Right then, Kayneth's neck suddenly felt an unnatural flow of air.

A piece of paper fluttered down beside him. It was an extremely ordinary piece of notepaper, but Kayneth fixed his eyes on the few concise words on it with a deadly gaze.

"– If you don't want your beloved one to die, then quietly look behind you –"

Stunned, Kayneth's eyes widened, and he moved the wheels of the wheelchair to change the direction his body was facing. Deep inside the pitch-black abandoned factory, the light coming in through a skylight illuminated one single place like a spotlight.

The outlines of woman, lying on the floor as if deep asleep, emerged out of the dim and cold light.

"…!"

Kayneth would never mistake those features no matter how dim the light is or how far the distance becomes.

Although the pain and haggardness on Sola's steel-grey face showed that something had evidently occurred, the strand of hair beside her mouth quivered as if blown by a breeze. That was the proof of her breathing. She was still alive.

Kayneth forgot the warning on the paper and almost cried out despite himself. Then, like a wraith emerging out of the darkness, a human figure stepped into the weak light and showed himself.

An old coat, those untidy hair and listless whiskers, and only those pair of eyes, different from the gloomy countenance, fierily emitted a razor-sharp light – that unforgettable man, the only one who had cruelly torn apart all the Magic Circuits in Kayneth's body, that hateful flunky of the Einzberns.

He had probably transported the unconscious Sola in quietly from the back door during the gap formed while Saber and Lancer concentrated in fighting each other. The barrel of the submachine gun in the man's hand aimed steadily at Sola's forehead.

"It just has to be… that bastard…"

Kayneth had experience that viper-like cruelty and seamless prudence first-hand. Compared to anger and hatred – a deep despair that far surpassed all other emotions made him hang his head powerlessly.

It really was the worse situation he could think of. The woman he loves was captured by the most difficult enemy that he didn't even want to imagine.

However, just before he sank into a panic, the voice of reason stopped Kayneth.

There must be some purpose for that man to deliberately show himself and let Kayneth confirm Sola's wellbeing.

"…"

Kayneth turned his head and cast a glance at Lancer, who was fighting with all he had in the abandoned empty area. Judging from the two Servants' position in battle, Sola's location was a dead spot that they can't see. The two of them were both bent on dealing with the strong enemy in front of them, completely ignorant to this new invader.

Kayneth couldn't guess what the man wanted, so he silently inclined his head, showing his intention of obeying the other's wish.

The man took a roll of vellum out of his coat and cast it into the air after casually opening it. Although the weight of vellum cannot be compared to the notepaper beforehand, simple manipulations of air was enough to make it fly with the wind. Like a jellyfish, the vellum floated across space slowly and leisurely, and landed on Kayneth's knees.

Although others would only perceive this as some meaningless figures and well-made patterns the things recorded on it was, for Kayneth, a perfect magecraft document written in a format that he was familiar with.

– Only that the content was very rarely seen.

Binding magecraft: Target – Emiya Kiritsugu

The Crests of the Emiya family hereby command: Provided that the following conditions are met, this oath shall become a commandment and bind the target without exception.

Oath:

To the fifth head of the Emiya house, Kiritsugu, son of Noritaka: regarding both Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald and Sola-Ui Nuada-Re Sophia-Ri, all intentions and actions to kill and harm shall be forbidden for all eternity.

Conditions:

……

"…!"

Self-Geis Scroll – one of the most merciless contract magecrafts that would only be used in the treacherous society of magi when a contract that absolutely cannot be disobeyed was to be made.

It is an enforced curse that forcibly uses the functions of one's own Magic Crests upon oneself. Theoretically, it has a power that cannot be erased by any method. Even if the caster lost his life, the Magic Crests would bind the soul of the dead man and would not pass down the generations. It is a very dangerous magecraft. For magi, a parley that involves offering such a declaration would in fact mean a maximal concession.

Although it wasn't something Kayneth often saw, it was indeed proper in the way it was written, with no loopholes. The signature made with the blood of the declarer himself was evidently pulsing with prana, showing that the spell was already established and was currently working.

That is to say – when the conditions recorded in the bottom half of the declaration is fulfilled, that man – Emiya Kiritsugu will give up a part of his free will, and the contract will be confirmed as an unbreakable curse.

Holding the vellum with shaking hands, Kayneth read the conditions to establish the contract over and over. As if hoping the contents would

change the next time, he reads it, he stubbornly contemplated those words repeatedly. He bent his entire will to consider if the contents left any gaps that may form contradictions.

However, different from Kayneth's wavering thoughts, the most logical part of his heart had already accepted his own yielding. The possibility that his beloved woman and himself may return to their homeland alive – at this moment, isn't that his greatest wish?

If he hesitated a few more moments, Emiya Kiritsugu would probably pull the trigger. After the first bullet took away Sola's life, the barrel would definitely point at Kayneth himself. There were no choices for him. Whether to lose everything or to regard that declaration as his last hope of life… that was the only difference.

With a dim and blank look as if he was an empty shell, he looked at the final Command Seal on his right hand and then gave the final unbreakable command as Lancer's Master.

Without a sign, without a reason – brilliant vermillion scattered all over the earth.

Everyone appeared to be equally shocked. Saber, Irisviel, and even Lancer himself widened their eyes at this overly abrupt end – Lancer's own shock should probably be the most intense, since he had not a sliver of expectation or preparedness for that agony and despair.

Dazed, Lancer gazed at the crimson flowers that dripped from the red spear shaft to the ground. No matter how, he could not believe that it was all his own blood.

His own beloved spear pierced his heart. It was no one else's but his own two hands that forcibly stabbed the spear tip into his own body.

Of course, it wasn't his intention, nor was it his wish. What his crimson spear was supposed to pierce was Saber's heart, and what was supposed to pierce his own heart should have been Saber's holy sword.

Able to rob everything away from him at a whim, regardless of his fighting spirit or beliefs – no such great power exists apart from Command Seals.

Because Lancer was overly focused on the duel with Saber, he did not notice the treaty secretly sealed in the dim abandoned factory beside him until the end.

“Use up all the Command Seals, and let the Servant finish himself’” – that was the required condition within the Self-Geis Scroll Emiya Kiritsugu brought up. He demanded Kayneth to use up all the Command Seals and completely destroy the Servant – a total retreat from the Holy Grail War.

“Ah…”

Crimson tears flew out of Lancer’s wide eyes.

For him, it was already the second time to be murdered by his lord. It was precisely because Diarmuid ua Duibhne was bent on overcoming that unhappy end that he wished so strongly to return to this world from the Throne of Heroes. However, the end that he received was a replay of that tragedy – he only experienced that despair and sorrow once again.

The Heroic Spirit looked behind him with eyes wet with blood and tears. Just then, two master’s walked out of the abandoned factory to witness his end. They were Kayneth, sitting on his wheelchair with an empty and dazed expression and another man, who stood and carried Sola’s comatose body in his hands. He was the anonymous true Master of Saber that he saw at Einzbern castle.

“Do you… so…”

Kneeling in a pool of his own blood, Lancer tried his best to speak with a hoarse and low sound.

“Do you want victory so much!? Do you want to win the Holy Grail so much? Even … willing to trample on my only true wish… you, don’t you feel ashamed!?”

His beauty twisted with blood and tears, changing into a completely different countenance akin to a demon’s. Lancer, forgetting everything except hatred, no longer distinguished between friend and foe. Thinking of Kiritsugu, Saber, and everything in the world, he roared out a growl of vengeance that tore at his heart.

“Unforgivable… I’ll never forgive you! You dead men who are slaved by fame and desecrated the glory of knights… let my blood stain that dream! I curse the Holy Grail! I curse that your wishes will become disasters! When you fall into the burning pits of hell, do not forget my, Diarmuid’s, anger!”

While he gradually lost his material body and crumpled as a hazy shade, he screamed curses until the final moment when he disappeared. There was no

longer the glorious figure of a Heroic Spirit, but only an evil spirit roaring with resentment. Servant Lancer had finally been completely eliminated.

"…"

As if at a loss, Kayneth gazed at the blank space left by Lancer's disappearance. Casually, Kiritsugu placed Sola, who was still deep asleep, on his knees. As Kayneth softly caressed the haggard sleeping face of his beloved, he asked Kiritsugu with a weak voice.

"… Then your enforcement has been…?"

"Ahh, it's established. It's already impossible to kill you…"

Kiritsugu slowly moved back as he took out a cigarette from his pocket and lit it – maybe that was the signal.

"For me, that is."

While Kayneth mumbled in a low voice Hisau Maiya, who witnessed everything in the shadows far away, silently pulled the trigger of the Steyr AUG assault rifle.

Kayneth and Sola were captured by the aim of the night vision scope and were mercilessly exposed to a rain of automatically fired bullets. For the two of them, who have lost the protection of Volumen Hydrargyrum and had no Servants left in service, the 5.56mm high-speed bullet rain of baptism was an inescapable gale of death. In the savage power of the bullets that they had so despised in the past, the magus and his fiancée's bodies were torn in pieces and fell to the concrete ground.

He only doubted if the magecraft of the Self-Geis Scroll was tempered with, but missed the trap hidden behind the meaning of the important contract. That finally took away the fate of the genius magus.

"Uuu… Ahhh!!"

Perhaps Sola, who died from the bullets without pain, was the luckier one. Tragically, even after he was transformed into a sieve and fell down from the wheelchair, Kayneth still remained breathing. He had been dealt many fatal wounds all over his body and had no more hope of surviving. However, even if he had only seconds left to live, it would be a cruelly long time if it were to be passed by enduring the pain and agony of death.

"… Ahhh… Kill… Kill me…"

“Sorry, that is a contract I can’t fulfill.”

Kiritsugu ignored the weak entreating sounds beside his feet, and replied with a nonchalant voice as he exhaled the purple smoke that he had breathed in.

The sound that sobbed with pain didn’t go on. Saber couldn’t bear to keep watching and used her sword to cut off Kayneth’s head, ending his pain.

At the end, the King of Knight’s sword did not fulfil the promise made with Lancer. On the contrary, it ended up far from faith and glory, and was stained with the blood of ending the pain of someone already wounded without hope.

“Emiya, Kiritsugu –”

The azure irises burned with a cold fire. They were not eyes used to look at friends, nor was it a sight used to face comrades in a broader sense. Identical to when she faced Caster’s madness and Archer’s arrogance, it was a look sharp as a blade used to pierce those that she had recognized as enemies.

“I finally understand it now; you’re a man without morals. I had originally thought that even if our paths differ, our goals are the same; but I was far too foolish…”

Kiritsugu still remained silent. There was already no need to answer. It was because the actions that Saber just witnessed were absolutely ‘evil’.

“Up till now, I’ve believed in Irisviel’s words and never doubted your character. However, even if a man like you now says that you’ll save the world with the Holy Grail, I won’t believe a word of it anymore.

Answer me, Kiritsugu! Did you deceive even your wife? Just what is the true reason that you seek the omnipotent wish-granting vessel?!”

“---”

Kiritsugu – although his eyes stared at Saber as if irritated, the mouth that held a cigarette still didn’t speak a word. It was a gaze used to look out at a wildly barking stray dog. It merely contained a decisive separation that gave up trying to understand each other using words from the start.

Within Saber’s heart, there was already a calm and resolute decision that almost said, ‘he must be killed’.

Maybe, at the end, the only thing left between her and this master would be to face him with her sword. Even if that will be prohibited by the Command Seals, this obvious enmity cannot be changed. This might be the largest fracture in their camp during the War of the Holy Grail. However, no matter what, as long as she's with Emiya Kiritsugu, it is very probable that she won't be able to obtain the Holy Grail that she truly wishes for.

"Even if my sword does win the Holy Grail, if I am to entrust the Grail to you, then I…"

That sunset over Camlann flashed past Saber's eyes. The wish hidden in her heart made her words blur at the end.

A sound from behind her interrupted that painful pause.

"Answer me, Kiritsugu. No matter what, this time you have the obligation to explain."

Even Irisviel, who trusted her husband completely, couldn't help but raise her voice in her question.

Different from Saber, she fully knew the way her husband thinks and understood him. However, there was a vast difference between the beliefs expressed in words and the stunning real actions before her eyes.

She already had a cold premonition that said, 'could it be…?' in her heart when Lancer questioned her about Lord El-Melloi's fiancée back then. However, the conscience in her heart denied that probability. No matter what, for him to do something of that degree…

At the end, even as his wife, Irisviel had underestimated Kiritsugu's ruthlessness.

"– Speaking of, this is the first time you witnessed my 'method of killing', Iri."

Changing from the silence that he's maintained until know, Kiritsugu answered with a dry voice. The dim and cold look that he gave to Saber shrank back shyly with shame as he turned to Irisviel.

"Nah, Kiritsugu. Don't speak to me, speak to Saber. She needs to talk to you."

"No, I've got nothing to speak with that Servant. There's nothing to be said to a killer controlled by glory and honor."

He fearlessly spoke words that insulted Saber while maintaining a front of speaking to Irisviel. Of course, Saber would not leave it alone.

“Don’t you dare to humiliate chivalry in front of me, you beast!”

Even if faced with the angry yells of the King of Knights, who raised her brows in rage, Kiritsugu stayed steady as a rock. He still paid no attention to Saber, fixing his gaze on his wife instead. However, at this time, he finally started to spill his words out endlessly.

“Chivalry cannot save the world. It was so in past histories, and it will be so in the future. Those people promoted the idea that there is a difference of good and evil when it comes to the method of battle and acted on the battlefield as if they have pride. Just because all the heroes of the ages were cloaked with that illusion, how many youths do you think were deceived by the glory of such courage and finally bled to their deaths?”

“That’s not an illusion! Even if it’s a matter of life or death, as long as it is the action of humans it must have rules and beliefs that allow no violation. Righteousness must not be lost! Otherwise, the endless flames of war will once again turn this world into hell at the end!”

Saber rebuked righteously. However, Kiritsugu snorted in derision.

“See, just like so – just like you said, Iri. This great Heroic Spirit dares to think that the battlefield is better than hell.

What a joke! No matter in what era, the battlefield has always been a veritable hell. In the battlefield, there is no place for hope. What lies there is only cold despair and a sin called victory, built on the pain of the defeated.

All those people who met there have wholeheartedly admitted the evil and foolishness of this act called ‘war’. As long as people don’t repent and don’t regard it as the evilest taboo, then hell would endlessly reappear in the world.”

For Saber, who only knew the utterly cruel, emotionless Kiritsugu, it was the first time she saw Emiya Kiritsugu’s other side – a man almost crushed by endless anguish and sorrow, his monologue that was close to lamentation.

“However, humans did not realize that truth no matter how high they staked their mountains of corpses. That’s because in no matter what era the courageous and fearless great heroes have always bedazzled the eyes of the multitude with their splendid heroic legends. Because of the wistful actions

of those idiots and their refusal to admit that bloodshed is by itself evil, the essence of humans has stayed on the same spot since the Stone Age!”

Just who was the target of the rage filling those pair of eyes – that was already clear without the need to clarify.

Ever since the day that the flames of war started on the land of Fuyuki, Kiritsugu had probably began looking at the shining figures of the Heroic Spirits before him, those who prided in courage and resolution, with that unendurable rage in his heart.

Those who left such heroism, and those who longed for such heroism; the anger directed at them and with nowhere to let out… it was a hatred toward the overall concept of ‘Heroic Spirits’ that was created due to the prayers of men.

“– then Kiritsugu, your humiliation of Saber… was it because of your hatred towards Heroic Spirits?”

“How could it be? I’d never mix in such personal emotions into it. I need to win the Holy Grail and save the world. I am only using the most suitable method in the processing of fighting for that goal.”

If he had fought as he had planned before, and if he didn’t capture Sola but killed her immediately, then Lancer, whose supply of prana would be completely stopped, would naturally disappear. However, what Kiritsugu employed was a strategy that completely removed the possibility of a Servant, having lost his master, forming a contract with someone else and returning to the battlefield. Based on the result of the battle against Caster he predicted that Kayneth, who was protected by the Fuyuki Church, may obtain extra Command Seals. Therefore, he prepared such a twisting and complicated trap.

Relying on the Command Seal of the rival Master to eliminate the Servant, and then take out the Master, a complete removal of the obstacle… during that time, what he demanded from Saber was not to win over Lancer but to distract Lancer’s attention while Kiritsugu convinced Kayneth, acting only as a decoy.

“The world as it is, the human nature as always, it is impossible to eliminate battles. In the end, killing is necessarily evil. If so, it is best to end them in the maximum efficiency and at the least cost, least time. If you want to slander that as foul and demean that as nasty, then do as you wish. Justice cannot save the world. I have no interest in things like that.”

“…”

Saber recalled Lancer's final, disappearing eyes filled of anger. Then, she stared at the tragic remains of the man and woman, collapsed in a puddle of blood, and the expression of anguish carved on their faces, and spoke.

"Even so, you –"

As Saber was about to speak her thoughts, she suddenly found that her own voice was lower and calmer than she thought it would be. She had just realized that her complicated emotions towards Kiritsugu was no longer her previous anger but had to change to some kind of pity.

That's right; maybe he is a man that should be pitied.

Isn't he himself that needed salvation, not this world?

"– Emiya Kiritsugu, I don't know what kind of betrayal you were subjected to in the past and why you despaired. But that rage, that lament, are undoubtedly things that those who pursued justice possesses. Kiritsugu, in your youth you should have wanted to be 'a hero of justice'. You should have believed in and wanted to become a hero who saves the world more than anyone else – isn't that so?"

Until now, the only attitudes Kiritsugu had shown to Saber were complete ignorance and cold scorn. But now, Kiritsugu, having heard Saber's quiet questioning – the eyes that he fixed on his Servant showed other emotions for the first time.

It was a rage seemingly close to boiling over.

The sound of car exhaust disturbed the silence of dawn. Then, the small truck that Hisau Maiya drove entered the yard of the abandoned factory with bright headlights on. She should be here to take Kiritsugu back to Shinto after concluding her duty as a sniper.

Kiritsugu took his eyes off Saber and walked towards the small truck, not even turning around, and opened the passenger side door. Saber was still speaking to his back. There was something that she had to say no matter what.

"Kiritsugu… do you understand? If you commit evil due to your hatred of evil, at the end all that's left will be evil. The rage and hatred that sprouted forth there will cause new wars once again."

Faced with Saber's heavy words, it was as if Kiritsugu had the intention to reply for the first time and wanted to turn around – however, he changed his mind at last, and said while staring at the empty air.

"I will stop the endless cycles. That's why I need the Holy Grail."

Indeed, as if talking to himself, he said loudly.

"I'll use this miracle to complete the revolution of this world, the revolution of all human souls. I will make the blood shed within Fuyuki city as the final bloodshed of all human beings.

For that, even if I am to carry 'all the evils of this world' – it won't matter. If that can save the world, then I'd gladly accept it."

"…"

Kiritsugu spoke the decision in his heart with such a calmness and evenness that even Saber could not find any words to reply to him.

Even if his method and path were unendurably evil – his faith in seeking the Holy Grail was pure and selfless. She had to admit that if there was a Master in the war worthy of obtaining the Holy Grail, then he would undoubtedly be Emiya Kiritsugu.

Wordlessly, Saber watched the departure of the small truck that Kiritsugu rode. The first ray of dawn shone beside her. The dark night that made Fuyuki into a demonic realm had departed, and the streets once again put on the mask of 'ordinary' beneath the sunlight.

"Is Kiritsugu… gone already?"

"– Irisviel?"

Since Saber had the time to think about the oddities in the question, she was unable to immediately detect Irisviel's strangeness.

That empty and wondering gaze, the pallid face, and the sweat pouring down from her forehead like a waterfall…

She was probably just forcing herself while she was beside her husband and pretended that there was nothing wrong. Irisviel fainted as soon as she relaxed and collapsed as if she was a puppet cut loose from her strings.

Although Saber immediately moved up and held her, the strange heat coming from the slender body in her arms made her realize that Irisviel was already in a critical condition.

“Irisviel!? Hang on!”

※※※※※

From the resolute and bold way that Emiya Kiritsugu declared his determination so loudly that morning, it could be seen that they were truly words from his heart without any falsity.

But just what those incredible, ominous words meant at the end – Kiritsugu finally understood it clearly a few days later.

In a despair even deeper than despair.

In a regret even deeper than regret.

Act 12

Act 12.

-65:49:08

Matō Kariya had fallen into a pitch-black dream.

He could see nothing.

He could hear nothing.

Only his skin could feel the shockingly dense pressure of the darkness.

Where, is this — here seemed to be inside someone’s body.

Therefore, Kariya asked the darkness—who are you.

As if with a suffocating pressure, the darkness rumbled low. Like the angry roars of stormy winds; like the sky had fallen and the earth had cracked.

"I am—

The alienated—

The ridiculed—

The despised—"

The dense black shadow that moved within the darkness was like a human shape poised to attack.

The bones and skull immersed in the pitch-darkness.

The pair of bright eyes even more terrible than the darkness.

Berserker—the manifestation of Matō Kariya’s curse, no, the Servant his hatred had called from the ends of time.

"No need to praise my name—

No need to envy my body—

I am the shadow under the radiance of heroic spirits—

Birthed of the darkness of glorious legend—"

Like a miasma that rose forth from underground, the sound of sighs of hatred wrapped around Kariya from every direction.

Kariya began to feel uneasy; just as he was about to turn his gaze, the icy touch of metal gauntlet gradually neared, catching mercilessly on Kariya’s clothes.

Thus, was Kariya’s thin body lifted into midair, before Berserker’s eyes—he was fixed in a position where he could not but meet that crazed gaze.

"And so—

I hate—

I resent—

Nourished by the sighs of the people precipitated within the darkness, people that curse the light—"

"..."

Kariya struggled against the gauntlets mercilessly locked around his throat, groaning in pain. In his eyes yet appeared another indistinct and confused scene.

A sword shining bright light, and holding onto the hilt, a radiant young warrior.

This person was not a stranger to Kariya.

That was the Einzberns' Servant – Saber...

"This is my disgrace—

Because of her unsullied glory, I must forever be belittled—"

The Black Knight's helmet cracked apart.

The face revealed was shrouded in darkness, but that pair of fiery eyes, and the teeth trembling from hunger, could be clearly seen.

"You are, the sacrifice—"

He pronounced coldly, embracing Kariya without another word, coldly flashing sharp teeth piercing into his jugular.

Kariya screamed in agony.

But this scream could not move the other. The berserk Black Knight sucked at the blood seeping from Kariya's throat and swallowed heavily.

"Good, give me more—

Your blood and flesh, your life—

Let them ignite my hatred—!!"

No...

Stop...

Save me!

Kariya used all the words he could think of to beg forgiveness, hoping there would be someone to extend a helping hand, but in this darkness, it was impossible for him to obtain salvation.

A miasma of red flashed intermittently before his eyes, consciousness confounded by pain and fear gradually becoming foggy.

But he still squeezed out the last remaining bit of strength and cried out in his loudest voice.

※※※※※

—Waking with a pained cry, he was still within the darkness.

But even thus, the stench of rotting given out by the ice-cold and damp air, as well as the hair-raising sound emitted by thousands of worms crawling, still told him clearly—this was, without question, the real world.

"..."

The dream of just now, compared to reality, exactly which world seemed more merciful to Kariya—

At least, from the one fact of being able to forget that this body was about to die, perhaps remaining in the world of nightmares would be happier.

By exactly what miracle he—burned and having fallen from the rooftop of a building—had been saved, and how he had returned to the underground worm storage of the Matō residence again alive, was now impossible to understand through his memory alone.

His limbs felt dulled, but he knew that he was chained to a wall, his hands shackled. He could not stand on his own feet; his shoulders, supporting the weight of his entire body, hurt as if they were about to be torn from their sockets. But compared to the itch of the worms covering his body, it was not even worth mentioning.

The worms licked at burnt skin, and under that skin was new skin colored pink. It looked as if the burns were currently healing—though the reason was unknown.

It looked as if the Crest Worms intended to use Kariya’s body as a seedbed to extend his life. But this was completely useless. In order to re-grow the skin, prana had already been forcibly consumed; the few days of life left in Kariya’s body were also about to dry up. He could clearly feel that even the simple action of drawing a breath and then expelling it was depleting his strength.

Very soon, he would die--

At the same time, he understood that he was absolutely unable to put up resistance, Aoi and Sakura’s faces were constantly flashing in his mind.

He had once vowed to save them with his life as the price… but in the end, his wish had not been fulfilled. This disgrace and shame tortured Kariya’s heart even more than the pain of his body.

Remembering the faces of the people he loved, but immediately after, the indifferent expression of Tōsaka Tokiomi and the sneer of Matō Zōken invaded his heart, pressed onto him until he could not breathe.

"Bastard…"

From the depths of his dry throat, Kariya cursed angrily with all the strength he had left.

"Bastard... bastard, bastard..."

The sound of his sobs was suddenly muffled by a sound of pleasured laughter that came from behind him.

The worms scurried to avoid the elderly and small silhouette propped up by a crutch and slowly walking closer to Kariya. It was none other but precisely the object of Kariya’s hatred, Matō Zōken.

"Ah, Kariya, you are really quite pitiful like this."

The elderly magus used his crutch to poke at Kariya’s jaw, forcing him to lift his head. Kariya no longer had the strength to rail at him, but nevertheless used his remaining right eye to glare at the other with hatred and murderous intent. Just looking disdainfully at his opponent already exhausted him.

“Don’t get it wrong—I’m not reprimanding you in any way. With such serious injuries, I’m surprised you came back here alive—Kariya, I don’t know who it was that saved you. But luck does not seem to be bad in the battle this time around.”

Zōken, murmuring gently to his ‘son’ as if caressing a cat, was in a particularly good mood today—thus the implication of evil was written all over his face that was full of smiles.

“Three Servants have already been taken care of; only four remain. Truth be told, I did not think you could actually hold out till now. It looks as if—this gamble, I may still have a chance at winning.”

And like that, Zōken suddenly finished speaking, retreating a few steps to distance himself from him.

“Perhaps adding one more lock on you is not a bad idea. Ah Kariya, since things have come to this point, I will pass on to you the ‘trump card’ I have secreted away for this day, come on— “

Ku, Zōken’s crutch suddenly pushed at the hollow of Kariya’s throat, forcing him to open his mouth. Immediately after, it moved upward like a mouse, and was fiercely stabbed into Kariya’s mouth.

“Ah, uu…!?”

Kariya fainted from the pain. The worms followed the cavity of his mouth and mercilessly invaded his gullet, finally arriving within the spasming abdomen. Now, even if he had wanted to vomit, he could not; it was already too late.

After which—as if a red-hot block of metal had been placed into his stomach, an intense burning sensation grilled Kariya’s body from the inside.

"Uu… ah!?"

Kariya began to struggle in agony; the cuffs on his hands jangled. The blood which seemed to have stagnated now boiled, runaway, and his heart also pounded crazily, almost to the point of breaking apart.

That had been a piece of concentrated prana. The Crest Worms within Kariya’s body, which had temporarily regained vitality, began to move again. The mock prana circuits of Kariya’s entire body also started to pulse like never before, and his limbs were beginning to feel pain as if they were being torn apart—but this also meant that Kariya’s numb arms and legs could feel again.

Seeing the 'trump card' take effect, Zōken jeered loudly.

"Huhuhuhu, this does have immediate results.

Do you know? That piece of prana you swallowed just now came from a Lust Worm. The one that first absorbed Sakura’s innocence. How about that, Kariya? The vitality of a young girl, absorbed continuously over the course of this past year—it is the best magecraft energy of all, yes?"

And perhaps it was this chain of cruel actions that satisfied his sadistic heart; the elderly magus turned around; his face full of smiles. Just as he was about to leisurely leave the worm storage, his derisive mockeries once again pierced into Kariya’s ears.

"Go forth and fight, Kariya. Burn up completely the life snatched from Sakura. Do not be stingy with your blood and flesh but bring back the Grail! If one like you can do it, that is."

After which, with the heavy closing of the doors, the surroundings were once again only filled with icy darkness and the noise of crawling worms.

Kariya began sobbing silently.

-64:21:13

The warm afternoon sunlight gently warmed the outer walls of the storeroom and gradually slanted towards the west.

However, the air in the storeroom remained silent and cold. A few rays of sunlight shone in from the small skylight, as if bathing the storeroom in the soft dusk of afternoon.

Saber was sitting on the ground with her back against the wall, waiting for the arrival of that time.

In the magic circle beside her was Irisviel, who still laid face-up with her hands crossed across her chest. She was still deep asleep. Saber had, without moving, gazed at her sleeping profile ever since she brought her here this morning.

Would the magic circle that Irisviel and she drew together yesterday work as expected?

For Irisviel, who is a homunculus, it appeared as if resting in this magic circle is the only way of recovering. In the past, a ceremony would also be

held with it. However, considering the current situation, it seemed to be a very distant and unreachable past.

It was truly a long night.

Caster, who hindered the battle and joined mid-way, was finally defeated.

And then, the duel with Lancer ended into a heartrending manner.

The War of the Holy Grail made great advancements last night, with two Servants leaving the battle. Saber could indeed be said to have played an extremely important part no matter what the situation of battle was.

It would be a lie to say that she's not tired, but right now she was more worried about Irisviel's situation.

She recalled that they were already signs since morning. Irisviel had called it a defect in the functions of a homunculus. However, Saber couldn't figure out just what had happened yesterday to make her body condition worsen so much. It wasn't due to wounds, nor did she undertake overly vigorous exercise. If this situation happened to the Master that formally sealed a contract with Saber, then it's very probable that it was due to Saber's tiredness and the increase of the prana supply that increased the master's burden. But if that were the case then it shouldn't be Irisviel, who is only a substitute Master, but Kiritsugu instead.

The gentle sunlight shone in through the skylight. As the time went past noon, the sunlight also slowly changed its angle.

Finally – Irisviel moved slightly. The stilled air moved as if there were ripples stirred within.

Saber immediately widened her eyes and saw that Irisviel was slowly sitting up as she moaned in anguish.

"…Saber…?"

Lazily brushing the silver strands of hair away from her eyes she looked at Saber, who guarded her side, with a lost gaze.

"Irisviel, how are you doing?"

"…Umm, mm. I'm fine now."

That’s impossible. Saber wanted to rebuke, but she saw that the reddish color of Irisviel’s cheeks have returned to its normal healthy state. It’s hard to believe that she was in a coma until now.

Ahh, she gave a small stretch, as if joyfully waking up in the morning after having fully rested.

“Mmm – looks like I made you worry.”

“N… no. It’d be great if it’s really fine… but…”

“Mmm, I understand what you want to say, Saber.”

With a bitter smile, Irisviel combed through her long hair with her hands, and tidied her clothes that have gone slightly messy.

“Looks like I really did have a lot of problems after I came here. It shouldn’t matter if I just remain quietly like this, but – Saber, from now on, I may be unable to stay beside you and support you anymore.”

“Irisviel…”

Irisviel said in a rather downcast manner. On the contrary, it made Saber a little surprised.

“Sorry, although it’s very embarrassing, but compared to becoming your burden –”

“No, that’s not it. I hope you’ll be more careful with your body. It’s all my fault. I feel like this is a reminder to me, saying that because I forced you to continuously participate in battles that you…”

Saber stopped, afraid that what she may say next could hurt Irisviel. Irisviel smiled weakly and said.

“You don’t need to worry about that. We homunculi are different from humans, and we understand the structure of our body very clearly. It’s like a car; if a car doesn’t flash a warning light when the gas runs out, then that’s really what’s called malfunctioning.”

“…”

Although those words were correct, the analogy wasn’t fitting enough. Hearing this, Saber became silent with a gloomy face. Then, with a very serious gaze, she looked at Irisviel with a frontal stare.

“… Irisviel, although you are indeed a homunculus, but I never thought of treating you differently from ordinary humans. Therefore, no matter what, you don’t need to speak so lowly of yourself.”

Saber said it so straightforwardly that Irisviel conceded her defeat.

“… Saber, you’re so gentle.”

“Everyone who got to know you would think this way. Irisviel, you’re a very charismatic person.”

In order for the conversation to stop being so heavy, Saber deliberately joked with a light tone.

“For a woman, her body would often have various discomforts. There’s no need for you to be ashamed.”

With that, even Irisviel gave a bitter smile of embarrassment.

“Speaking of that, Saber, you’re also a girl – umm, wouldn’t it be problematic? You have to act as a man during such times.”

“No, about that –”

Seeing that Irisviel’s face has regained its usual smile, Saber relaxed, so she continued with a tone that’s even lighter than usual.

“You wouldn’t know it, but I had the extra protection of my Noble Phantasm when I was alive. Not to mention disease, even aging had stopped for me. Therefore, no discomforts would appear for my body. I’d still be like I am right now even ten years later.”

“…”

Then, Saber suddenly saw that Irisviel’s expression became anxious, as if she was in discomfort, so she quickly stopped.

Although she couldn’t understand how come this casual topic got Irisviel so down, Saber discovered that currently Irisviel was in no mood to chat with her.

“– Anyways, Irisviel, you don’t need to worry about anything. Indeed, I would be more relieved with you covering me, but now not many enemies are left. Even if I act alone, I’ll still have complete confidence in victory.”

“… Saber, if you truly act ‘alone’, then I won’t worry either.”

Saber couldn’t help but feel a bitterness welling up in her throat when she realized the true meanings of Irisviel’s words.

Yes, she wasn’t acting alone. The Master that made a contract with the Servant Saber was still on the same battlefield.

“Hey, Saber… from now on, will you be able to treat Kiritsugu as a comrade, and fight beside him?”

She wasn’t able to answer immediately. This act showed the struggles within the King of Knights’ heart blatantly.

“… If all other master’s seek the Holy Grail only due to their own selfish desires, then I believe the Grail should be obtained by Kiritsugu. I have no objection over becoming his ‘sword’ due to that.”

As she answered with a subdued tone, Saber furrowed her brows as if she couldn’t hide her distress.

“– But I wish the only one who becomes a ‘sword’ would be me. I don’t want to once again intervene in Kiritsugu’s methods.”

Saber’s heart couldn’t help but feel a throbbing pain as she recalled Diarmuid’s end.

No matter how much she understands the man called Kiritsugu, no matter how much a concession she’s willing to make, Saber cannot forgive that scene no matter what.

“Now I need to perform battles that Kiritsugu has to agree with. As a Servant, I can obtain victory without staining the master’s hands, can’t I? The remaining three Servants cannot win against me no matter what.”

Irisviel nodded. She could only nod. It was already a miracle for Saber to retain such a fighting spirit after having witnessed Kiritsugu’s despicable behavior with her own eyes. However, on the other hand, she also knew that right now Saber wanted very much for Kiritsugu to trust her at least minimally, but there was no possibility for Kiritsugu to do so. The meaning of the phrase ‘true victory’ differed as drastically as heaven and earth between the ‘King of Knights’ and the ‘Magus Killer’.

Relying on her unyielding will to strive until victory is obtained and a perseverance that allows her to rise once again no matter how many times she’s defeated –

A prudence that completely eliminates all possible reasons that may cause his defeat –

Although their goals are both the same, their methods are fatally different.

“For me, the Holy Grail is like myself. Because from the moment I was born, I have the ‘vessel’ that allows its descent.”

Hearing Irsiviel’s words, Saber nodded.

“I heard about it. Your duty is ‘the guardian of the vessel’.”

However, although Saber is with her 24 hours a day, she still does not know how and where she hid the ‘vessel of the Grail’. Since they trusted each other, then there’s no need for her to ask. All Saber needs to do is to accept the ‘vessel’ from her hands once she obtained victory in all battles.

“…Therefore, no matter what happens, I hope that my ‘treasure’ would be passed into the hands of those I love – Kiritsugu, and you, Saber.”

Irisviel said, as if praying. Saber nodded resolutely.

“Back then, when I was first summoned, I already swore to protect you and obtain the final victory. I don’t plan on going back on that oath.”

“…”

Irisviel could only smile and nod ambiguously.

If they were to fulfil the initial purpose of the ‘Three Noble Families of the Beginning’ – reaching ‘Akasha’, then Command Seals must be used to demand Saber, who has defeated all the Servants, to kill herself and use all seven Heroic Spirits as sacrifices for the Holy Grail to end the war. However, what Irisviel and Kiritsugu entrusted to the Grail was no such wish. Although the wish of ending all conflicts and ‘changing the world’ seemed immense, it does not leap out of the boundary of ‘miracles’ at the end. The changes that occur according to its result would only happen ‘within the world’ at the maximum. It is really too easy compared to the goal of reaching ‘the root of all things’ that is ‘outside’ the world. However, if they only want to fulfil a miracle in the physical world, then they wouldn’t need the ancient Lady of Winter herself as the ‘vessel’ to completely awaken the Great Grail. Enough prana would be replenished for Kiritsugu and Saber to fulfil their wish as long as they defeat the other six enemy Servants.

However, what Irisviel was more worried about in the two's process of experiencing this cruel war of survival was – compared to the enemy's strength, what was more important was Kiritsugu and Saber's disagreement.

As their ways of living and beliefs were the complete opposite, the conflict between those two were unavoidable. Therefore, Irisviel believed that she should do her best to soften the conflict between them. But regarding whether she can actually achieve that – actually, there was already no more hope.

Because Irisviel's body was already –

" –? Someone's presence is getting closer, Irisviel."

Saber's face was covered with alertness. Then, Irisviel also detected the guest from the reaction of the bounded field established in the courtyard.

"– Ahh, don't worry. This is Maiya's presence."

With a soft knock of the storeroom door, it was indeed Hisau Maiya herself who came in. She had her usual cold and dispassionate expression, and her icy cold beauty made Saber move her eyes away with some displeasure. Judging from her action of mercilessly shooting Lancer's two master's dead, she was indeed only cruelly and loyally executing Kiritsugu's plans. However, Saber found it very hard to agree to such an action.

It was unknown whether Maiya understood those inner thoughts of Saber's. Like always, she didn't greet them, nor did she say anything in a roundabout way, but cut into the main topic straightaway.

"Tōsaka Tokiomi sent a secret messenger. He got his familiar to bring a letter. Madam, it is for you."

"Secret messenger?"

After Irisviel withdrew from Einzbern castle, it had become a dangerous house of traps under Kiritsugu's hand in order to make other unaware master's fall into the bait. Maiya's bats were responsible for surveillance. Just then, a familiar, not a magus, had appeared there with documents.

"It was a jade bird. According to Kiritsugu's deductions, it should be a puppet that the Tōsaka magi habitually use."

"That's what I heard too. Then, where's the letter?"

“Here –”

Taking the note that Maiya handed to her, Irisviel began to read. All pleasantries and formalities were emitted on it, and the writer’s intentions were written very simply and openly.

“… That’s to say, he petitions us to fight together.”

Irisviel gave a snort of derision. Saber was the same. Just thinking about that Archer’s Master’s intentions made her annoyed.

“An alliance? At this point?”

“Tōsaka should feel very uneasy about how to deal with the remaining Rider and Berserker. He thinks we’re the easiest to deal with, so he invited us to unite with him – that’s to say, compared to the other two groups, we were belittled.”

The letter said that if Irisviel is interested in a negotiation, then Tokiomi would humbly await at Fuyuki Church at midnight tonight.

“As the Supervisor, the Holy Church should stay neutral. How did it agree to let him do this?”

“That’s because it appears that the Supervisor, Father Risei, is already dead. That is to say, the War of the Holy Grail has no Supervisor this time.”

Hearing Maiya’s explanation, Irisviel nodded with approval.

“Kiritsugu said that the relationship between Tōsaka and the Church had also been exposed with this. The Supervisor, who supported him, died, so he began to change his plans in a hurry.”

“…Irisviel, the opponent is the magus that controls Archer. I feel that we shouldn’t trust him.”

Remembering her disgust towards that golden Heroic Spirit, Saber concluded with caution.

“I am at my optimum condition now my left hand had healed completely. I can single-handedly defeat Rider and Berserker without a need of forging alliances. Of course, Archer is of no exception.”

Saber said, full of confidence. Irisviel nodded first, but then crossed her arms with concern.

“Although what Saber said is true, but Tōsaka has other things that can force us to concede. He has things we don’t… such as certain intelligences.”

Maiya nodded upon hearing this.

“Indeed. For example, if Tōsaka can get information about the whereabouts of the headquarters of Rider’s camp, then it’s worth the risk of going into his trap and obtain this intelligence.”

“– Can that still be unknown? I didn’t think such a kid would make it so troublesome for Kiritsugu.”

“It’s because Rider and his Master usually ride their high-speed flying Noble Phantasm, so it’s impossible to follow them on land. My bats are also unable to match their speed, so we can never catch them.”

“…”

“Concerning ways of hiding their trail, can they be even better than that Lord El-Melloi?”

“Although it is surprising, we have checked all the locations within the entire Fuyuki area that a magus may set up a workshop, but still didn’t find Rider and his Master.”

Like Maiya said, what troubled Kiritsugu the most at the moment was the search for Waver Velvet’s headquarters. Although Emiya Kiritsugu knew well all the methods for a magus to hide himself, he still couldn’t have guessed that a Master omitted even accommodation funds and boarded in civilian houses straightaway.

“But what are the possibilities that Tōsaka Tokiomi have such intelligences?”

Maiya replied affirmatively.

“Tōsaka Tokiomi had conducted various sorts of thorough preparations from the beginning of the War of the Holy Grail. The Supervisor is a very good example; moreover –”

Maiya paused when she reached this part, and discreetly gave a glance at Irisviel’s expression. She, who was silent, appeared to have thought the same as Maiya.

“– Moreover, we think that Tōsaka is also controlling Assassin’s Master – Kotomine Kirei, in secret. If that man stands at a position that can influence

Kotomine Kirei, then his invitation is still advantageous for us in some degree.”

“Kotomine Kirei…”

It was the first time Saber heard this name, but she easily understood this man means very much to them just judging from the solemn and heavy expressions Irisviel and Maiya were wearing.

“Remember this, Saber.”

With an oddly stiff tone, Irisviel said.

“In this War of the Holy Grail, if someone can defeat Kiritsugu and obtain the Holy Grail… then he must be this man called Kotomine Kirei. Kiritsugu said so himself. He had locked the goal onto this man named Kirei from the beginning.”

Maiya and Irisviel didn’t say much. But even so, Saber still obtained a rather clear understanding of this man called Kotomine Kirei.

Now that they spoke of it, Saber also recalled a mysterious attacker, who was hiding in the castle, had badly injured Irisviel and Maiya during the battle in the Einzbern forest.

With a resolute tone, Irisviel declared thus.

“Apart from the matter of alliance, there is the need to find out what intelligences lay in Tōsaka’s hands at the moment. Let me go to Fuyuki Church to confirm it tonight.”

Since such a clear command had been given, Saber couldn’t say much anymore. Moreover, she was also very attentive of that person named Kotomine. If Kiritsugu can consider him as a nemesis, then he must need special attention without a doubt.

“– Right, Saber. You have a job today too.”

Saber was rather confused when Maiya suddenly called to her.

“Oh?”

“Yes. Since you could skillfully drive that Mercedes, I’ve prepared a mechanical prop even more fitting for guerrilla warfare according to Kiritsugu’s orders.”

Hearing this, Saber appeared to be interested.

“That’s good. A machine that is more suitable to battle than a ‘car’ is a very big help for me.”

“It’s parked outside right now. Take a look to see if you can use it.”

“Mmm, I’ll go right now.”

Saber walked out of the storeroom with expectant and light steps. Maiya watched her leave, expressionless as usual. However, she sighed within her heart for the fact that Saber appeared only as an ordinary girl no matter how one looks at it, and it’s absolutely impossible to discern that she was the King of Knights, Arturia – no matter what, ordinarily, Saber only appeared to be a rather mature short girl; no one would believe that she was indeed that king who made glorious victories during that battle-ravaged time.

It was rare for Maiya to have such meaningless emotions for things apart from work. Just as she was about to mutter something to herself, which is rarer still, she heard something fall down beside her.

Turning her head, she saw that Irisviel, who was sitting in the magic circle just now, was once again lying on the ground. Her state was very unusual. Sweat was pouring down her pallid face; her breathing was painful and fast.

“Ma-madam… what’s wrong?!”

Maiya hurried up and took her in her arms. The slender body in her arms was abnormally hot.

“… Did Saber… see this?”

Irisviel asked bitterly, with no fear or shame in her tone. She seemed to have no questions about these sudden abnormalities happening to her body.

“Madam, your body, just what…”

“… Hehe, Maiya’s panicking face… is actually… rather cute…”

“What are you talking about? Now’s not the time to say this. I’ll get Saber and Kiritsugu here immediately, please stay awake!”

Maiya was about to stand up, but Irisviel reached out and pressed down on her shoulder.

“This isn’t abnormal; this was – predetermined a long time ago. For the current me to continue existing as a ‘human’ is already so lucky it seems miraculous.”

Sensing that there were deeper meanings in her words, Maiya calmed herself. Although she was still nervous, she had recovered her usual cool.

“… Does Kiritsugu know this?”

Irisviel nodded, but she softly added a ‘but’.

“Saber… does not know. She still has to face important battles… don’t let her worry about anything else.”

With a deep sigh, Maiya once again let Irisviel’s body lie quietly face-up within the magic circle. She knew this is the position for her, who is a homunculus, to fully rest.

“… Should I also pretend that I don’t know about this?”

“… No, Maiya… I have something to say to you… is that alright?”

Maiya nodded, stood up, and looked outside the storeroom. After she made sure Saber was no longer in the courtyard, she quietly closed the door and returned to Irisviel’s side.

“Ok, Saber can’t hear us now.”

Irisviel nodded, adjusted her rapid breathing, and said calmly.

“I am the homunculus designed for the Heaven’s Feel… you should know this.”

“… Yes.”

“The guardian of the vessel – my duty is to manage and transport the ‘vessel’ prepared for the Holy Grail’s descent. Actually, that’s not completely accurate.

During the previous Heaven’s Feel, not only did Grandfather Acht lose his Servant, the precious ‘vessel’ of the Grail was also broken during to the war. In the Third Heaven’s Feel, since the ‘vessel’ was damaged before the victor was decided, the war was meaningless. That’s when Grandfather began to reflect and decided to cover the ‘vessel’ this time inside a humanoid shape that has a consciousness and can self-manage.”

Her nonchalant voice was as if she was leisurely recounting things that have nothing to do with her. It was probably because she's seen through everything that she had decided to speak out everything about her body.

"And that is – me. The 'vessel' itself was granted the instinct to live. In order to dodge all sorts of dangers by itself, Grandfather made the 'vessel' into 'Irisviel'."

"How can that be… then, you…"

Maiya's heart was not cold as a rock. She couldn't help but lose her composure when faced with the impact of this fact.

"Three Servants have already deceased in battle, and the war would end very soon. The function of the 'vessel' within me would begin to ceaselessly put pressure on this unnecessary outer appearance with the passage of time. In the future I would, gradually and without a doubt, become unable to move, until at last – Maiya, I wouldn't even be able to talk you like this."

"…"

Biting her lower lip, Maiya was silent for a while, and she carefully repeated her previous questions once again.

"Does Kiritsugu really know everything? Does he know what kind of situation you're currently in?"

"Yes, that's why he gave me Saber's scabbard… Avalon • All is a Distant Utopia… do you know its abilities?"

"The ability to stop aging and limitlessly heal the wielder – that's what I heard."

"It prevented the peeling off of my 'outer shell'. I originally thought I'd be overcome very quickly, but thanks to it I can still maintain a human appearance and behave as such until now… also, if I increase in distance from Saber like now, the situation would suddenly worsen…"

She was already unable to get up. Faced with Irisviel, who seemed as if sunken to the edge of death, Maiya couldn't help but lower her eyes.

Maiya cannot imagine what Saber's response would be had she been here. Rather than suffering herself, the girl who was the model of chivalry would be more distressed with others' pain. If she knew that the victory that she expected can only be achieved with Irisviel's sacrifice as the prerequisite, it

would be unknown whether she would still be able to grasp the holy sword like before.

“… Why are you telling me this?”

Maiya asked.

Irisviel only smiled peacefully.

“Hisau Maiya – you’re the only one who won’t pity me. You’d definitely agree with me… that’s what I believe.”

“…”

Maiya gazed at her smile silently, then nodded soundlessly.

“Madam, I – I had originally thought that you’re someone who’s very hard to be close to.”

“No such thing – can you understand me?”

“Yes.”

Maiya nodded without hesitation, showing her agreement.

It was precisely because she was a woman who was born as a human but lived as a machine that she’s able to express ‘agreement’ to another woman who was made as a machine but faced her end as a human.

“Even if I were to give up this life of mine – Irisviel, I would protect you till the end.

Therefore, for Emiya Kiritsugu, please don’t die. For the fulfilment of that man’s dream.”

“Thanks…”

Stretching out a shaking hand, Irisviel grasped Hisau Maiya’s hand.

-62:48:35

The twin black eyes that stared at him from his chest level were like a pair of jewels.

Yes – that was the truth; Tōsaka Tokiomi once again felt it himself. This girl is the ultimate treasure that the Tōsaka family obtained after five generations, a rare shining gem that equates to a miracle.

Tōsaka Rin.

Although she was yet young, she was destined to become a beauty in the future judging by her looks. Rather than her mother's appearances, Rin had more similarities with Tokiomi's mother when she was young.

The time was dusk; the veil of night has yet to fall.

Arriving at his wife's house, Tokiomi, in front of the doors of the Zenjō house, did not plan to step inside. Right now, Tokiomi was one of the masters who seek the Grail and had long entered the realm of Shuars. In order to protect his wife and daughter, he had entrusted them to the Zenjōs. This realm does not allow blood or gore to invade.

With a nervous expression, Rin gazed at her father, who had called her out of the door but didn't speak a word. Her father didn't just come to see her but arrived with something very important. Instinctively, the girl understood it this way.

He had originally decided not to see his daughter until the end of the war. What made him waver was Father Risei's sudden death last night.

The old priest was his father's good friend and watched Tokiomi grow up. Under the secret pact sealed between the two parties, he was there to support Tokiomi's back. For Tokiomi, this was the biggest factor that made him have a sure confidence in winning.

Of course, Tokiomi isn't someone who would be at a loss once he loses his backup. However, it is an indisputable fact that a dark cloud named "unforeseen" had appeared on the road to victory that he had believed wholeheartedly in till now.

Just like how that experienced and stubborn priest had suddenly fell – his own confidence had also suddenly been cut in half.

Till yesterday, the victory of the Heaven's Feel had appeared to Tokiomi as something already in the bag. However, due to the death of his trustworthy companion, at this time he had also made the preparation to devote himself in the gunpowder-covered battlefield as a fighter.

What if… this is the last time he talked to Rin?

Faced with the young girl before him, what should he say?

“…”

Rin swallowed, staring at her father, and waited for him to speak to her.

Tokiomi knew the respect and longing his daughter had towards him, who is her father.

He knew that what he said to his daughter today would definitely decide Rin’s road from now on.

No – there were no doubts for the future; it has all been decided long ago. Rin has no choice but to inherit the title of the sixth head of the Tōsaka family.

Perhaps it was because of this thought that Tokiomi now bore a little bit of guilt towards his daughter.

He knelt down and put his hand on Rin’s head – at that time, Rin suddenly widened her eyes with surprise.

Only when he saw his daughter’s reaction did Tokiomi remember that he has never caressed his daughter’s head like this before.

It was normal for Rin to be shocked, too. Tokiomi also discovered, for the first time, that he didn’t even know just how he should express his gentleness to his daughter.

“Rin… put the Association in your debt by the time you mature. I’ll let you decide what to do after that. You should be able to take care of yourself.”

He originally had some doubts and didn’t know what to say; but once he opened his mouth, he began to speak on and on.

He had thought of many ‘maybes’; there were many things to be passed on. How to manage the treasures – that is, jewels – in the house, and the rules of the basement workshop that was inherited from the Great Teacher – all such things, Tokiomi focused on key points and recounted to Rin, who was intently listening.

Although there were no Crests, but in truth, it was equal to having Rin appointed as the head of the Tōsaka house for the next generation.

On a side note.

Tōsaka Tokiomi was definitely not a genius.

Compared with the members of the Tōsakas through the generations, his talents are mediocre at best.

The reason that the Tokiomi right now is a skilled and respected magus was largely due to the fact that he had always loyally obeyed the family creed.

That was why he could always be confident and elegant –

If he wanted to achieve a ten-fold result, then he must give out twenty-fold of practice. Elegantly and composedly pass all sorts of cruel training; that had become Tokiomi's creed. If one has to find something about him that's better than others, then maybe it would only come down to the two things of complete self-control and a will of self-restraint.

His father, who was both his teacher and the previous head of the household, should already have fully foreseen just what a hard journey his son would embark upon if the son had the way of magecraft as his ambition. Therefore, when his forebear passed the Magic Crest onto Tokiomi, he had repeatedly asked his son – 'will you inherit the family business?'

These questions are merely very ritualistic, and it's only for a show too. As the only son, what Tokiomi had been taught since childhood was an education of how to become a leader. This pride that was nurtured since his childhood made him have no other dreams in his life.

Even so – this method of 'asking' was still used; that is, Tokiomi still has an incomplete 'ability to choose'.

Now that he thought back, for Tokiomi, this was the best gift that his father gave him as the previous head of the family.

Tōsaka Tokiomi decided to enter the way of magecraft through his own will and decided not to be swayed by fate.

It was indeed this preparation that gave Tokiomi an iron will. What supported him through the days of merciless, strict practices ever since then was indeed this proud overconfidence of 'this is the way of life I chose for myself'.

If only he would be able to pass the treasure that he got from his father onto his daughter – Tokiomi thought sadly.

However, that was already impossible to be achieved.

For Rin and Sakura, there were no choices for them in the first place.

One of them has all elements, having five multiple elements as her alignment. The other has no elemental alignments, having Imaginary Numbers only. Both sisters have a rare potential that can be equated to miracles. This had surpassed the limits of so-called natural talents or inborn skill; it is almost like a curse.

A magical nature would equally gather magical powers to it. Prominent people who are far outside the rules inevitably ‘gather’ equally extraordinary experiences. This cannot be controlled by the person’s own will. There is only one way to deal with this kind of a destiny – consciously walk away from the rules yourself.

Apart from understanding and practicing the way of magecraft themselves, there are no other ways to deal with the magical powers hidden in the blood of Tokiomi’s daughters. Moreover, the protection of the Tōsaka house can only be endowed on one of them. This fact tormented Tokiomi for a long time. The one who did not become the inheritor would get mired in all kinds of odd evens due to her own blood, and trouble bound find her. If the Association found this kind of ‘ordinary humans’, those guys would definitely gladly put her in formaldehyde as a specimen in the name of ‘protection’.

Precisely because of that, it was nothing better than a godsend for the Matō house to hope to have Sakura as their adopted daughter. He had obtained the way to have both his beloved daughters inherit first-class magecraft, unconstrained by their bloodline’s consequence, and carve out their own lives. At that time, Tokiomi could be said to be freed from the heavy burden of being a father.

But can it really be achieved? – Tokiomi didn’t even have that confidence. This question continued to torment him.

With Rin’s talents, she should find it to be easier to understand the mysteries of the way of magecraft than Tokiomi.

Therefore, compared with embarking on this road through a choice of his own will, what a painful thing it would be if she tries to escape her destiny but still ends up on this path at the end.

If he is unable to give any guidance on the trials that Rin will face and just disappear like this – would such a Tōsaka Tokiomi count as a fitting father?

As if questioning the confusion in his heart, Tokiomi once again condensed all his thoughts into the hand he had put on Rin's head.

Rin let his large hand caress her head, but her jet-black eyes remained gazing, unmoving, at her father. There was not a sliver of anxiety or doubt in that look.

"– Ah, really."

This unconditional reverence and trust finally brought answers for Tokiomi.

There was no need to apologize to this child, nor worry about her future path. Faced with the proud child of the Tōsaka family, the previous generation, who was about to pass away, no longer needs to entrust anything else.

"Rin, the Holy Grail will appear eventually. It is our duty as the Tōsaka family to win it. More importantly – if you want to be a magus, you can't avoid it." The girl nodded adamantly. Her eyes made pride fill Tokiomi's chest.

"Rin, the Holy Grail will appear eventually. It is our duty as the Tōsaka family to win it. More importantly – if you want to be a magus, you can't avoid it."

The girl nodded adamantly. Her eyes made pride fill Tokiomi's chest.

Tokiomi did not feel this kind of pride even when he inherited the position as the head of the family.

"I'll have to get going now. You know what to do now, right?"

"Yes – take care, father."

Rin answered resolutely with a clear voice. Tokiomi nodded and stood up.

Lifting his head, he cast one look inside the house and happened to catch the eyes of Aoi, who was standing by the window and peering out.

Trust and encouragement were in his eyes.

And thankfulness and reassurance were in her eyes that responded to him.

Just like that, Tokiomi turned his back on his wife and daughter, and left the Zenjō house without a backward glance.

Confusion is a shadow created from a restless heart. That is far from elegance.

Remember the family creed in your heart; Rin's sight told him that once again.

If he still had regrets towards his daughter, then – it must be his failure and the self that cannot fulfill his long-cherished wish through the Holy Grail.

If he wants to become a father that can lift his head up high and proudly puff out his chest in front of Rin, then Tōsaka Tokiomi must become a perfect and flawless magus.

Only then – can he complete the magecraft art of the Tōsaka family with his own two hands.

He must become a father who's fit to teach and guide his daughter, a truly perfect father.

With a brand-new decisiveness, Tōsaka Tokiomi embarked on his return journey in the dusk.

Once again towards Fuyuki.

Soon, the veil of the night would descend.

-58:16:21

Regarding the midnight meeting at the Fuyuki Church, Tōsaka Tokiomi had naturally defined the number of people allowed to attend in the conditions.

Apart from the respective Master and Servant, both sides can also bring along a supporter.

For Irisviel, who found it difficult to act alone, she never expected such a condition to exist. It would be impossible for her to rely on Saber's strength if she happens to accidentally be caught in a battlefield later on. If Maiya happens to be beside her at that time, she would be much more at ease.

Of course, as the reciprocal condition, one other person also attended apart from Tōsaka Tokiomi and Archer – at the end, when Tokiomi introduced that

follower to Irisviel and the others as if it was nothing important, they couldn't help but change their expressions a little.

"Let me introduce him, Kotomine Kirei – my student. Although he was also someone who competed with all of you, it was in past. He had lost his Servant and had given up the rights of a Master for a long time."

Is that all? Irisviel cast a dubious look at the other man, but Tokiomi was full of calmness and appeared not planning to say much else. Maybe he was underestimating the opponent. If not – then he may still be unaware of the feud between Irisviel and Kotomine Kirei.

Saber, leisurely reclining against the wall behind Tokiomi and the others, glared unblinkingly at the red-eyed Servant. Tonight, Archer had also removed his battle arrays and put on a set of ordinary clothes suitable to this era. Although the outfit, decorated with leather and lacquer, looked like it was full of a distasteful glamor, it did not create any incongruities when paired with the overwhelming presence of the golden Heroic Spirit.

Those blood-red eyes looked as if they stripped away Saber's clothes just with their sight, licked and caressed her soft skin. What seeped out of his eyes was blatant lust. Although this inevitably stirred up Saber's impulse of immediately drawing her sword and go into battle, she could only endure it when she thought of Irisviel.

"I am immensely thankful of your arrivals upon receiving my invitation."

It was unclear whether he noticed the pressing presence of the three women; Tokiomi solicitously offered his opening speech.

"The Heaven's Feel this time is also finally about to enter the most important stage. Right now, all that's left are the Masters of the 'Three Families of the Beginning', and one sudden intruder – then, do you of the Einzbern family have any thoughts on this battle situation?"

"No."

After answering thus with a cold and clear voice, Irisviel continued to speak audaciously.

"We have the strongest Saber, so there's no need to stealthily grasp every opportunity. Just walking towards victory like this would be enough."

"Is that so –"

With a provoking undertone, Tokiomi couldn't stop himself but laugh.

“Then, please allow me to speak of my own thoughts. Putting aside our respective strengths for now, let us talk about Berserker and Rider first.

Of course, our final goal is to let the ‘Three Families of the Beginning’ remain and therefore ensure the right of possessing the Grail in the final battle. However, very unfortunately, due to a strategic mistake of the Matō family, a Servant that needs to spend large amounts of prana was summoned by a weak Master. I fear that they would face their demise sooner or later. It seems the one that would obtain victory among them will be Rider. I guess that you would also know something about the might of that Heroic Spirit Alexander.”

Tokiomi paused, waiting for Irisviel to react. However, seeing that she remained silent, Tokiomi continued speaking.

“A newcomer who suddenly popped out of nowhere dares to stretch his hands towards the Holy Grail, in which two thousand years of longing were entrusted; does Einzbern not feel very uncomfortable about this?”

“Speaking of newcomers, aren’t Tōsakas and Matōs included in that too?”

Normally, Irisviel will never speak so unscrupulously, but tonight’s strategy was to completely suppress Tokiomi. When she discarded her daily gentleness and demureness and stood upright to confront, she seemed as inviolable as a beautiful and adamant queen.

But Tokiomi wasn’t going to succumb just with that. He still carried a solicitous smile, and his expression didn’t waver a bit.

“Since what Einzbern wishes for is only the fact of achieving the Third Magic, then would it fit your original intentions if you were to entrust the Holy Grail to me, Tōsaka Tokiomi, with my goal of reaching ‘Akasha’?”

Hearing this, Irisviel cast a contemptuous sneer towards Tokiomi.

“Could it be that the Tōsaka family would even beg just to rob the Holy Grail from our hands?”

“Huh… although the explanation would make one doubt the questioner’s moral character, it doesn’t matter. The question now is that this guy who knows nothing about the Grail has the possibility of obtaining the final victory. I would definitely not allow the Holy Grail to fall into a layman’s hands – our opinions should be the same on this point.”

To put it simply – the one that Tokiomi considers as most threatening is only Rider. Irisviel agrees with that point.

Since she already understood the opponent's intent, then it would be about time for her to state her position.

"We Einzbern have never had the habit of uniting with others. A so-called alliance will only make others laugh – however, if you want to fight enemies one by one, we would also express our sincerity."

"… Go on."

"Regard Tōsaka as our enemy only after all other masters are defeated – we're willing to obey such an agreement."

Irisviel's roundabout way of speaking made Tokiomi nod his head coldly.

"That's to say, a ceasefire agreement with conditions attached. It's appropriate for both parties."

"We have two demands."

As if trying to suppress the other and take the initiative, Irisviel followed up,

"Firstly, give us the information you have on Rider's Master."

Tokiomi sniggered in his heart when he heard this. Since Einzbern made such a demand, then it meant she really wanted to go defeat Rider herself. This development was completely within his expectations.

"– Kirei, tell them."

Hearing Tokiomi's command Kirei, who had stayed aside and waited silently, began to explain with a flat tone.

"Rider's Master is an apprentice magus named Waver Velvet, who was studying under Kayneth. He now flats in the home of an old couple surnamed MacKenzie in Miyama city, Nakagoe 2-chome. They are an ordinary family that has nothing to do with the Heaven's Feel, but they think Waver is their own grandson under Waver's hypnosis magecraft."

Kirei finished fluently. Hearing this, Irisviel and Maiya couldn't help but shiver. Although they've roughly guessed it, they didn't think that Kirei, who had once controlled Assassin, could undertake a war of intelligence so thoroughly.

"… Alright, what's the other condition?"

Tokiomi urged delightedly. Irisviel stared straight at him with a solemn and heavy expression and spoke with an uncompromising tone that didn't allow the opponent to decline.

"The second condition – is to eliminate Kotomine Kirei from the Heaven's Feel."

Tokiomi, who originally had a leisurely expression, couldn't help but gape when he heard this. However, Kirei remained nonplussed, and didn't even move his eyebrows.

"I didn't mean to kill him. I'm only saying that he needs to leave Fuyuki – no, leave Japan – before the war finishes. We hope that he'd depart tomorrow morning."

"Can you explain the reason?"

Tokiomi calmed the wavering of his heart and requested with a rather low voice. Irisviel, who could tell people's emotions very clearly, believed more firmly that this pair of teacher and student has estrangements between them – it was obvious that Tokiomi did not know what Kirei did exactly.

"That Executor has quite a feud with us Einzbern. If Tōsaka is to include him in your camp, then we would be completely unable to trust you. We would regard you as the target to be eliminated first and unite with Rider and the others to initiate attacking you."

"…"

There wasn't a single hint of joking in Irisviel's tone. Finally, Tokiomi detected that there were many things he didn't know, and cast a doubtful look towards Kirei, who was beside him.

"What's going on, Kirei?"

"…"

Kirei remained silent, expressionless as if wearing a mask. However, since he didn't make any rebuttal to Irisviel's words, his silence was enough to explain the problem.

With a sigh, Tokiomi once again hid his emotions in the bottom of his heart and gazed at the Einzbern camp with a nonchalant expression.

"As the substitute of the late Father Risei, Kirei had inherited the job of the Supervisor. If you believe that he must leave, then we have a condition too."

Silently, Irisviel inclined her head and motioned for him to continue.

“– I observed last night’s battle. That Saber of yours has a Noble Phantasm with an overly-powerful destructive power; we hope that you can restrain her use of it.”

Now Saber furrowed her brows. She understood that Tōsaka wanted to forcibly push the duel with Rider onto her. She could only regard this extra condition as being too unreasonable.

“Why are you interfering with our battle tactics?”

“We are the managers of Fuyuki. If the Heaven’s Feel is going to leave the concealment of the Holy Church and proceed openly, then I hope unnecessary disturbances can be avoided.”

At this moment, Maiya, who had been quiet until now, suddenly interrupted.

“Saber’s Noble Phantasm caused damage to the surrounding structures last night?”

“– Luckily, it was minimal damage. Coincidentally, there was a large ship on the path of her attack. However, one mistake would have indeed flattened all the houses on the opposite riverbank.”

“It was us who placed the ship there.”

Hearing Maiya’s words, Saber’s eyebrows twitched. Indeed, it was precisely because that ship was there that she was able to use Excalibur without worries. However, she only knew upon hearing Maiya that it was actually prepared by Kiritsugu.

“On a side note, we’ve already confirmed that the owner of that ship has bought insurance. The Einzbern camp has already thoroughly considered the destructive power of Saber’s Noble Phantasm without needing you to remind us.”

“I’m asking you to put your so-called consideration into a treaty.”

Rather toughly, Tokiomi interrupted Maiya’s words.

“It is unconditionally forbidden to use Noble Phantasms on ground level in Fuyuki city. The same applies even if you’re on air if it would indirectly cause harm to residents – can you agree to this condition, Einzbern Master?”

“… If I agree, then would Kotomine Kirei really leave Japan?”

“Ah, I assure you of it, and can be held accountable.”

Tokiomi nodded without hesitation. Kirei, beside him, couldn’t let out his anger and could only grit his teeth tightly by himself.

Irisviel consulted Saber for her opinion. Saber nodded to show that she agreed.

Saber also did not want her Noble Phantasm to create unnecessary sacrifices. This wouldn’t count as exceeding restriction if Tōsaka Tokiomi’s concern was the same as hers.

“– Very good. Since you confirmed that you can fulfil the condition, then we also agree to a ceasefire.”

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After the meeting concluded, Kotomine Kirei remained in the church, which both masters have left, all by himself.

Just like Tokiomi said then, Kirei, right now, as a member of the Holy Church, was proceeding with managing the aftermath all around Fuyuki City. Due to the death of his father, Risei, who was the Supervisor, the on-site command chain was completely fuddled and there was absolutely no time to wait for the Assembly of the Eighth Sacrament to send in the official successor.

However, the work at each scene was now progressing methodically after giving only appropriate directions to the management at each place. This showed that the orders Risei made when he was alive was very much correct. Kirei’s job was to continue along the trail that Risei had already lain down and sends the duties down one by one; in truth, it wasn’t anything particularly difficult.

But right now, he must make a decision concerning his work.

Actually, for Kirei, he had already understood that his situation was dangerous when he sensed Tokiomi had the intention of making an alliance with the Einzberns. The decision that he made at the meeting just now wasn’t surprising, either. The Einzbern women – and Emiya Kiritsugu, the

true manipulator behind them – had gradually realized Kirei's threat towards them, whereas he was only an 'ordinary assistant' for Tōsaka Tokiomi. Therefore, the alliance with Einzbern was more important to him than Kirei.

Moreover, Tokiomi didn't know about the Command Seals that once again appeared on Kirei's arm and the existence of the Command Seals that were taken back for safekeeping and secretly inherited from Risei. Nor had Kirei told him that Saber's real Master, Emiya Kiritsugu, had yet to make an appearance, or that Matō Kariya was saved. The fact that he was hiding such important information at this time meant that Kirei had already discarded his duties as Tokiomi's subordinate. Tokiomi would discover this sooner or later; right now, Kirei didn't have the right to complain.

After contacting the employees distributed everywhere by phone, Kirei returned to his room alone. He sat down on the edge of the bed and felt the quietness and stillness of the empty church.

Kirei questioned his own heart while he stared at the darkness.

He had already asked himself like this thousand and tens of thousands of times in his life up until now.

But this question was really pressing down on him tonight. Only, this time he had to come to an answer before dawn break.

Just what, is my wish?

Among the vast amount of information that the employees passed on while they were cleaning up the aftermath, there were two pieces of information that Kirei could not ignore.

One – an adult male body that died in a weird fashion appeared before the public at the riverside, where things have sunk into chaos after being stirred up by Caster's sea demon. The corpse was taken over by the Holy Church and avoided being handed over to the police. It could no longer be identified due to severe facial damage, but due to the traces of the Command Seals on its right hand it can be roughly determined that he was Caster's Master, Uryū Ryūnosuke. Cause of death – large diameter rifle bullets with diameters of 30 millimeters or more, two shots.

The other report was even more shocking.

Just a few hours ago, the bodies of Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald and Sola-Ui Nuada-Re Sophia-Ri were found within an abandoned factory on the outskirts of Shinto. The two bodies have similarly been discovered by

Church employees while patrolling and were dealt with. A discarded and signed Self-Geis Scroll was found at the scene. This was the naked evidence of the perpetrator having used despicable means to kill Lancer's Master.

Emiya Kiritsugu – this cruel and emotionless hunting machine was eliminating his opponents one by one.

What he was afraid was that Kiritsugu was still continuing the war somewhere out there. Different from Kirei, who could only sit on the spot, perplexed, he was stepping towards the Holy Grail pressingly.

This battlefield named Fuyuki made a man who had continuously devoted to hollow battles re-emerge after a nine-year long silence. However, before Kirei knew just what his intentions and reasons were, he has to leave here.

What would that man pray for when he obtains the omnipotent wish-granting vessel?

Would that answer really fill up the emptiness in Kirei's heart?

"… Who, are you?"

He suddenly muttered to himself. He had once expected Emiya Kiritsugu with a premonition almost equal to prayers, expecting his answer. Now Kirei had a sense of danger. The image that crisscrossed his mind was that of the women who stood upright in front of Kiritsugu and protected him. Why would they risk their lives for Kiritsugu? Or was it that Kiritsugu had sunken so low, to the mundane degree of sharing his own goal with a third party?

Kirei felt a presence stirring up in the deep quietness. The presence was approaching him from the corridor outside his door. Kirei had already become very familiar with this presence. Even if he was only walking silently, that Heroic Spirit did not hide the flamboyant majesty emanating out of him. Even if he were stepping into the realm of gods, he remained as obstinate and unrestrained as ever.

Archer didn't knock and stepped into Kirei's room straight away. He sneered with a sarcastic and pitiful tone when he saw Kirei was deep in thought.

"What are you thinking of, even at this stage? There should be a limit on being slow."

"… You let Tokiomi-sensei go back on his own, Archer?"

“I was with him until the house. Recently there were poisonous insects more treacherous than Assassin lurking in the night.”

Kirei nodded. That Emiya Kiritsugu won’t ignore the meeting just then; he would definitely seek an opportunity to act during Tokiomi’s journey to or back from the meeting. Kirei had briefed someone thoroughly about that point – not to Tokiomi, but to Archer.

Kirei and Gilgamesh

“However, you really are an honest guy. Knowing that your situation is getting worse but still worried about the safety of your lord.”

“This is a logical decision. I had long finished my duty of being Tokiomi-sensei’s tool, and there were no reasons left to keep staying at Fuyuki.”

“– You don’t really think that, right?”

Archer’s gaze seemed to have seen through everything. Silently, Kirei gazed back at him.

However, Kirei didn’t plan to rebuke, because what Archer said wasn’t wrong. Otherwise, he wouldn’t be sitting here idiotically, and would already be preparing for leaving Fuyuki.

“Even now, the Holy Grail is still calling to you, and you yourself are also longing to keep on fighting.”

Archer said thus. Kirei remained silent and gave up on rebuttal.

No matter what he says, there’s nothing to hide in front of Archer. That Heroic Spirit had even seen through the fact that he was only deceiving everyone including himself. Then, maybe the answer that Kirei had always sought was also already within his heart.

It was as if those twin red eyes were gazing from above at little white mice, wandering lost and perplexed. There was no inducement, nor was there salvation; maybe appreciating other’s worries was something that made the King of Heroics delighted.

“… Ever since I can remember, I’ve been looking into one question.”

As if confessing to the darkness within his heart, Kirei stood in front of Archer.

“Wasting time, enduring the pain… but everything ended in fruitlessness. However, right now I feel that I have never been closer to the ‘answer’.

What I seek must be at Fuyuki, at the end of the war.”

After he said those words, Kirei once again understood just what drove him to walk on till today.

It was a long time ago, when Kotomine Kirei was yet to be Tōsaka Tokiomi’s hound. The Kirei back then continuously stirred up dissent just for himself.

“Since you’ve reflected so much, then why are you perplexed?”

Archer asked coldly.

Hearing this, Kirei lowered his head and looked at his open hands, then covered his face as if going to sigh.

“I have an ominous premonition – I would walk towards annihilation when I have obtained all the answers.”

If the expectation that was endowed on Emiya Kiritsugu was not fulfilled –

And if he couldn’t find something else in Matō Kariya’s end either –

Then, Kirei could no longer turn back; he could only face it. He could only try to face the thing that he discovered in the deaths of his father and wife.

It would be better for him to just turn around and leave. Be Tōsaka Tokiomi’s deferent disciple until the end and obediently leave. That way, it would at least look better on the face of it.

And forget everything from now on. Don’t ask anything, don’t demand anything, and pass through a busy but mundane life like a plant would. No matter what he had lost, this would at least let him rest in peace.

“– Don’t think of those boring things, idiot.”

Archer’s reminder interrupted the thought that he had almost been prepared to fulfil.

“You won’t be troubled until now if you could change your way of life so easily. You, who’s used to questioning while you’re alive, would die with questions at the end too. You won’t receive the answer and can’t rest in peace.”

“…”

“Maybe I should congratulate you. You’re finally going to arrive at the destination after such a lengthy journey.”

“… You would congratulate someone else, Archer?”

Archer inclined his head. There was still no sentimentality on his face, but it was sparkling with an innocent and joyous light like a child observing an ant hill.

“I should have told you that observing humanity’s cause and retribution is the most interesting entertainment. I, the king, full-heartedly looks forward to the moment when you come face to face with your destiny.”

The King of Heroes said this gallantly. Hearing this, Kirei gave a bitter laugh.

“Is it really so fun to live so stubbornly for the greed of ‘enjoyment’?”

“If you’re jealous, you can try to live a little like this too. You won’t fear annihilation once you comprehend just what is enjoyment.”

The phone in the priest’s office in the corridor outside rang. As if he had already predicted it, Kirei did not appear to be surprised in anyway. He walked out of the room, picked up the receiver, and quickly disconnected the phone after just a few words and returned to the room.

“– What’s wrong?”

“It’s a call from the employees of the Holy Church who originally worked under my father. They now have to report everything to me.”

Seeing that Kirei’s expression was unusually relaxed, Archer furrowed his brows and asked.

“Are there some good news?”

“You could say that. This news is quite decisive.”

After this, Kirei hesitated for a while, considering whether he should say it. However, at the end, he still chose confession.

“I sent people to follow those from the Einzbern camp after the end of the recent meeting. I told them it was my father’s order given before he passed

away, so they went and did so. Thanks to that, I found out the place where those three are currently hiding."

After Archer heard Kirei through, he couldn't help but be stunned for a little while.

Then the King of Heroes laughed heartily. He clapped continuously.

"– Honestly Kirei – you really are –! Haven't you already made up your mind ages ago!"

He was still using his own position to detect the movements of the enemy camps, so it would be impossible for him not to join the fight. While Kirei was being anxious, the battle strategy had made concrete advancements.

But he had not made the mental preparations just then – just a few minutes ago.

"I was lost once and had also wanted to give up. But at the end – King of Heroes, it's like what you said – someone like me can only live on with questions."

As Kirei spoke, he rolled up his sleeves and confirmed the Command Seals on his arms.

There were two Command Seals on his left lower arm. Command Seals that would allow Kirei to make a contract once again with a Servant.

Meanwhile, the Command Seals that were taken back for safe keeping and inherited from his father covered his entire right arm. The innumerable Command Seals, yet to confirm a target for a contract, can be used and forged into highly practical prana that has no alignments, and can be used to restrain Servants as well. That means they can be used as mock Magic Crests. Apart from the fact that they are expandable, the magecraft that Kirei now possessed was enough to rival famous magecraft houses that have collected their Crests through the generations. Kirei's preparation was more than enough for him to continue participating in the Heaven's Feel that was still going on.

There were no greater good and no illusionary glories on the road before him. A battle that only belonged to Kotomine Kirei was about to start.

In order to fill his own nihility, in order to confirm the capacity of his own emptiness – he would question Emiya Kiritsugu, question Matō Kariya, and question the wish-granting vessel, the Holy Grail.

“Hahahaha – however, Kirei, although it’s a bit abrupt, I have a few questions.”

Archer laughed madly and arrogantly. Those blood-red eyes were permeating with the implications of a prank – and at the same time carried an evil shade.

“If you’ve really decided to participate in the War of the Holy Grail, then you would become Tōsaka Tokiomi’s enemy. That’s to say, right now you’re staying defenselessly in the same room with the enemy’s Servant. Isn’t this very awful?”

“Not necessarily; I do still have ways to keep myself alive.”

“Oh?”

Archer, interested, narrowed his eyes.

Kirei spoke calmly.

“Since now I am already opposing Tokiomi-sensei, then I don’t need to hide his lies anymore – Gilgamesh, let me tell you the truth of the Heaven’s Feel that you don’t know about.”

“… What did you say?”

Hearing this, Archer furrowed his brows with perplexity. Kirei proceeded to speak thoroughly of the truth of the Heaven’s Feel that he got to know from Tokiomi.

“The miracle that occurs in the ‘inside’ of this world cannot be used universally on the ‘outside’ of the world. The fight over the wish-granting vessel is only a camouflage; the ‘Three Noble Families of the Beginning’ has other plans.

The ceremony that had originally been held in Fuyuki was a kind of attempt to use the souls of seven Heroic Spirits as sacrifices to open the road that leads to the ‘Root’. The promise of ‘Fulfil a miracle’ was also only bait used to attract Heroic Spirits. However, as the result of the unilateral spread of this ‘bait’, the current Heaven’s Feel had lost its original meanings and is only left with an empty shell.”

This is a secret known only to the Matōs, Tōsakas, and Einzberns and people related them. The foreign master’s and all of the Servants are oblivious to this truth.

“This time around, the only magus who wants to fulfil the once long-cherished wish of the ‘Three Noble Families of the Beginning’ is Tōsaka Tokiomi. He wants to kill all seven Servants to activate ‘the Greater Grail’. That’s right kill all seven. Do you understand? – that’s why Tokiomi-sensei was so stingy with the expenditure of Command Seals. He can only use two Command Seals in the battle with other Masters. He needs to use the final one that’s left to order his own Servant to commit suicide once everything is finished.”

Archer heard him through without interruption, then questions with a lowered voice and with an extremely apathetic expression.

“… You’re telling me that the loyalty Tōsaka Tokiomi had shown to me were all to deceive me?”

Kirei knows his teacher’s character. Therefore, he slowly shook his head.

“He indeed does have the uttermost respect for ‘Gilgamesh, King of Heroes’. However, it’s completely different for the Servant Archer. That’s to say, you’re only a representation, a meaning not too far off from a statue or a portrait. Everyone who walks past it would give it a respectable look of admiration if it’s put at the most conspicuous place in a gallery – but if this representation was removed when the collection is being rotated off, then it would be despised.

That’s to say, Tokiomi-sensei is a complete ‘magus’ at the end. For him, a Servant is just a tool. He had once calmly told me that even if he admires Heroic Spirits, he won’t harbor any illusions towards idols.”

Hearing Kirei’s account, Archer nodded dramatically as if suddenly realizing something, then once again showed that evil smile he had beforehand. There was cruelty within tolerance, decisiveness within boldness; it was the smile of a king who was an absolute existence, who could decide everything with just one word.

“Tokiomi – today I’ve finally discovered your worth. Even that boring man can make me so delighted.”

If viewed from the meanings hidden beneath those words, this was definitely a tragic declaration enough to freeze someone’s blood.

“King of Heroes, what do you plan to do? Will you still show loyalty to Tokiomi-sensei even so, and punish my betrayal?”

“Yes, what should I do? Although he has been disloyal to me, Tokiomi is after all my prana provider. Moreover, where would I get a perfect Master –”

Archer stopped speaking, and suddenly gazed at Kirei with a cold expression.

“Ah – speaking of, it seems like there is a Master here who had obtained Command Seals but had lost his Servant.”

“You speak the truth.”

Using a smile to reply to Archer’s naked lure, Kirei lowered his head.

“But does that man have the worth to be graced with the favor of the King of Heroes?”

“No problems. Although it’s not flawless, there is enough potential. Maybe he’d even be able to let me thoroughly enjoy myself.”

– Like so.

At that moment, the final Master and Servant chosen by fate exchanged smiles to each other for the first time.

※※※※※

‘It’ was lost in an abyss of shallow slumber within the darkness sealed in the bottomless earth.

What ‘It’ dreamt of in the shallow slumber – was the endless ‘prayers’, unreasonable and unattainable, that have been entrusted a long time ago.

A beautiful world. A beautiful life. A flawless soul.

Because such longings were too strong, so they had to entrust all other evils to one place; that was the wish of the fragile men.

Through answering that ‘prayer’, ‘It’ had once saved a world.

There is no evil apart from me. This is no imperfection apart from me.

I am the only one who should be hated. I am the only one who should be abhorred.

Like thus, ‘It’ saved the world, and let them obtain peace.

Therefore –

‘It’ was not a saint who saved men and aided the world. Without praises, without reverence, without tributes, but only with spurns, only curses, only disdain… before ‘It’ knew it, even its name as a human had been rubbed away, only left with a title of its ‘way of existence’, and finally became a concept that was passed down through the ages.

Until now, all that had already became a dream of memories that had had its full share of time’s baptism.

Just how much time had passed since then?

Right now, ‘It’ was thinking dazedly on top of the bed it had slept on peacefully.

It felt like some complicated changes had occurred. That’s right; it was about sixty years ago. Something had happened almost in the blink of an eye.

Because it happened so suddenly, ‘It’ didn’t understand everything completely – when ‘It’ came to, ‘It’ was already at a place like a mother’s warm placenta.

An infinite darkness that sighed in the deepest place beneath the earth.

Back then, it had been a place that had concealed an ‘egg’ that had endless possibilities. One day, like a seed, ‘It’ entered and planted its roots into this place. From that day on, that place because the abdominal cavity that nurtured a darkness that didn’t belong to anything, veritably became a uterus with the purpose of fostering ‘It’ into maturity.

Since then, ‘It’ had surely absorbed the prana that flew in from the leylines in the earth like a baby that obtained nourishment from the mother’s placenta while ‘It’ slept in its shallow slumber. While ‘It’ veritably grew, ‘It’ waited without being discovered by anyone for the arrival of an opportunity.

Waiting to one day leave this scorching profound darkness, the moment of delivery.

Suddenly, ‘It’ – perked up its ears and listened for the sound coming from near ‘It’.

Just then, someone really did speak.

“…all the evils of this world… it won’t matter… gladly accept it…”

Aaah, someone was calling ‘It’.

Blessing and itself were both called by someone.

Answer him. It must be able to right now.

The prana whirlpool that had swelled long ago to an incomparable size in the darkness gave ‘It’ a concrete form.

The endless ‘prayers’ that had been entrusted in the distant past should also be able to be fulfilled right now.

An ‘existence’ like something that was preyed upon.

‘Going to do’ all the things that were wished for.

All the pieces of the puzzle had been assembled.

The gears of fate grinded together, and were now turning bravely, accelerating with the day of completion as their goal.

All that’s left – was waiting for the birthing canal to open.

As ‘It’ dreamed in its shallow slumber, ‘It’ emitted cries that will dye the world crimson red…

‘It’ also repeated its contractions in the darkness beneath the earth, unknown to anyone else.

Postface

Postface

– Tanaka Romeo

The third volume of Fate/zero has launched its attack.

Is everyone prepared?

Reading is an act of invading the book, and we would normally finish our manipulation of it with the conclusion of our read.

Like so, we recall the story in our memories as we discuss it logically. This is the way adults read.

But sometimes this rule also shatters.

Originally planning to read the book but got read by the book for no apparent reason. Although planning to manipulate, I was already being manipulated when I realized it.

Something like this had happened while reading Fate/zero volume 3.

Without needing further explanation, this book is a spin-off of the monstrous visual novel Fate/stay night. This is a volume that incorporated the situation that had appeared and continuously proceeded and became more tortuous in the previous volumes, and also included signs of an even more tremendous and eventful future. The volume of ‘change’ in the entire flow of ‘beginning, continuation, changes and conclusion’.

The author is the superstar of the PC gaming world, famous for his subtle way of writing – Urobuchi Gen.

Through reading this book, you must have strongly felt the style of the creator of the Fate world, Nasu Kinoko-san, with those poignant and powerful words.

At the same time, for those who are very familiar with Urobuchi Gen, you should have also smelt the very thick ‘Urobuchi’ scent between the passages that he had so delicately recreated in the style of the original work.

Exquisite. Overwhelmingly exquisite. Had it been his own literary work, his own topic, on his own grounds, such exquisiteness would have been understandable. However, for Urobuchi to be able to achieve such exquisiteness on someone else's home ground is simply extraordinary.

This is especially so for the work of Fate; one must have extraordinary powers in order to dexterously use its world view.

I've been attentive to Urobuchi from his first work till doujin activities, therefore I have been familiar with him for a long time.

However, his performance in Fate/zero still made me stunned.

The more I read, the more I felt envious of him.

It was evidently interesting, but there was also a bitter taste. I fell into a state of intertwined bitterness and joy.

Words as neat as artworks and those boiling, igniting souls showed to be perfection of a higher class.

I sighed with feeling when I finished reading the entire book.

You readers who can simply enjoy it's fun are truly blessed.

Alright, here ends the envy of a fellow author, and I'll talk a little about my personal thoughts.

Actually, it wasn't just one or two kinds of sentiments that boils up after the reading.

If I want to avoid clumsily laying out pretty words, then I can only judge it coldly and impartially, while also being able to randomly write out what I thought of in my heart.

Let's touch upon it briefly in the range allowed without spoiling it for you.

The third volume is the volume of change in the story and portrayed all sorts of happenings.

Thinking of those things, and these things.

And even such things?

Bullying Saber is progressing extremely well.

Again, Rider, you…!!

Waver~~!!

A rebound attack? No, no, that… that's right, a waste of efforts! It's really too much!

Ahhhh, Lancer…

El-Melloi!

Gil-ga-me-sh (accepted the invitation)

That's how it is. (Not understanding it at all)

No, it must be under the condition of not having spoilers…

After all, after I read all that, I couldn't control myself.

I went out.

Although I felt like a Ferrari, unfortunately a Ferrari only exists in my imagination, and I could only walk with the feet my parents gave me.

There were no destinations. Just casually strolling.

Once in a while casting a vigilant look at pedestrians who hurry past me.

My eyes beamed as I looked at the building roofs.

Checking if I was being followed.

Why do all that?

Obviously.

Because maybe the participants of the Holy Grail War were hidden amongst them.

Yes.

I planned to conduct the Holy Grail War within my brain. That was really tiresome.

But that’s alright. Today happened to be of good weather.

… Therefore, in a moment of carelessness, my Noble Phantasm “Personal Delusions” was accelerated.

Fate/zero is truly fearsome.